

for you, the stars

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/29982345) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/29982345>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen , M/M
Fandom:	Video Blogging RPF
Relationship:	Clay Dream/GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream & GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Karl Jacobs/Sapnap , Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Ranboo & Toby Smith Tubbo & TommyInnit , Clay Dream & GeorgeNotFound & Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF)
Character:	GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu , Cara CaptainPuffy , Darryl Noveschosch , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Floris Fundy , Karl Jacobs , Alexis Quackity , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Toby Smith Tubbo , Jack Manifold , Eret (Video Blogging RPF) , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Dream SMP Ensemble
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Space , the martian au , Angst , Hurt/Comfort , Gallows Humor , Team as Family , Friends to Lovers , Mutual Pining , from several million miles away , Outer Space , Stars , Domestic Fluff , (eventually) - Freeform , Recovery , Healing , Space Flight , there's a lot of space guys , NASA , Science Fiction , no knowledge of the martian needed to read this , no beta we die , BAMF GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Slow Burn
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of pyroeis circles the sun
Collections:	Crying at 2am and i just can't stop , Dream SMP fics that butter my bread , To the stars and back , teal's hall of fame , These fics have me on the floor , Books to absolutely reread like a thousand times , imma read later
Stats:	Published: 2021-03-11 Completed: 2021-08-10 Chapters: 25/25 Words: 115149

for you, the stars

by [andthentheybow](#)

Summary

There is exactly one person in the entire universe that knows Doctor George Davidson is alive, and that's George himself. Even with everything against him- starvation, damaged machinery, the environment, and human error- he's determined to not become the first person to die on Mars. And once they find out he's alive, his crew resolves to do everything they can to bring him home.

Notes

don't be creepy about content creators, these are my interpretations of their personas, if they're uncomfortable this will be deleted, etc etc

twitter really pulled through for me on this one. this is dedicated to ali alienu thank you for filling me with outer space brainrot

Ares

It takes six days for everything to go wrong.

The mission known as Ares III starts out perfectly normal. They have their crew- led by Commander Technoblade (first name redacted), they're practically unstoppable. They spent months training for this, getting to know each other; they spent even longer on the spaceship *Hermes* travelling to their destination. They have complete faith in their flight coordinators on the ground, and they have complete faith in each other.

Faith isn't enough to stop a storm, especially on a desolate planet.

Their surface habitat- the Hab- isn't enough to withstand a dust storm, and they know it isn't. Not to mention the fact that the MAV- their only way off the planet- is on the verge of toppling. It's Techno who makes the decision to abandon the mission, and his crew follows him.

They don their suits and begin the dangerous trek to the MAV. The wind is positively screaming; they can barely hear each other over their comms. Major Nick Sapnap leads the hike; he's their pilot, their second-in-command, and without him there's no way they're getting off the planet. He's followed by Doctor Niki Nihachu, their surgeon, the only medical doctor in the crew. Right behind her is Captain Cara Puffy, systems operator, and Doctor Clay Bloque, nicknamed Dream, their navigator and chemist. After that is Doctor George Davidson, their botanist, and at the back of the pack is the Commander himself.

They're all clinging to each other, the wind threatening to tear them apart. The MAV creaks restlessly, dangerously, tilting to one side. Sapnap is the first to reach it and pull the ladder down- he stops to make sure the rest of the crew is behind him before climbing aboard. He's made it to his seat and Niki's began her ascent when everything goes wrong.

A satellite comes flying out of nowhere. Dream ducks underneath it, pulling Puffy down with him. There's a crackle of static, Puffy screaming over the comms, and then the resolute *thud* of the metal hitting something else.

And then George goes flying.

He disappears into the dust storm before any of them can do so much as blink, torn away from the group. Dream is screaming, Techno is half turning around, ready to go back, and everyone is

yelling at each other. Puffy manages to get ahold of Techno's arm and pull him toward the MAV, shoving Dream up the ladder even as he resists and tries to get back into the storm. Everyone is screaming George's name, but things happened so fast-

"Niki!" Techno yells. "Vitals!"

"I'm not getting a read," Niki says breathlessly. "I'm-"

"No," Dream says insistently. "No, no way-"

Puffy shoves Dream down into his seat.

"There's still nothing," Niki says, shaking her head. "I- I think-" She can't even bring herself to say it. George is dead.

Techno is seated next to Sapnap, now, and they're ready for takeoff. Everyone is still talking over each other. Sapnap turns to the Commander.

"We're ready to go," he says. "Commander."

Techno is staring, like wishful thinking will bring George back. Slowly, he nods.

"*No* -" Dream starts.

"Commander, I need verbal confirmation," Sapnap says, looking terrified.

"Go," Techno chokes out.

"*NO!* " Dream cries again. Sapnap hits the button, and the MAV shoots off into the sky.

George wakes up with his entire body on fire and an incessant beeping in his ears.

The events of the previous... whatever, day, night, he doesn't know, come back to him slowly, then all at once. Holy shit. Holy shit-

He sits up and his torso screams in pain. He looks down and oh, that's a piece of metal embedded in his stomach, tearing through his suit. The MAV is gone. The Hab is, somehow, still standing.

"Oxygen levels low," the voice in his ear says. His head is fucking pounding. He pulls himself up, using some of the debris around him as leverage, and manages to stumble his way over to the Hab. He rips off his suit and oxygen has never tasted so good. He's alive. He's alive, and his situation is sinking in as he realizes oh, fuck, his crew is gone, they probably think he's dead, and he's stranded on Mars.

Huh. He did not expect this mission to go like this.

He's fucked.

The first order of business: documenting the fact that he's still alive. He has no idea how long he'll last, but for now, he's going to need some proof that he didn't die in that storm. A video diary, then, because it's a hell of a lot faster than writing and maybe someday, when they come looking for his body, his crew will be happy to hear his voice.

"I'm fucked," is the first thing he says when he starts the recording. Then he glances down at the piece of metal still embedded in his stomach. "I should probably do something about that before I explain everything else, though, so. If you're watching this, I'd probably look away right about now. I'm no medical doctor, so- Niki, don't yell at me for how horrible this goes."

He's never performed surgery on anyone else before, let alone on himself. After the first scream, he decides to pause the recording while he stitches himself up. When he hits play again, he's sitting in an oversized sweatshirt that may or may not belong to Dream and he looks a little less worse for wear.

"Okay," he says, and he pulls the sweatshirt up to reveal the nice new line of stitches going diagonally across his stomach. "I lost, frankly, a lot of blood, but I'm alive. Surprise!"

He takes a deep breath and runs a hand through his hair.

“So. Sol 6. We got our shit rocked by a dust storm, I must’ve got hit by something, and the telemetry on my suit was totally fucked, meaning the crew likely thought I was dead on impact. Surprise, I’m not! I’m here and kicking, and not very pleased about the situation.

“Not at my crew- they did their best. I’m not very pleased with Mars. Which sucks, because I’m gonna be here probably for the rest of my life. Go me!”

He pauses. “That is kind of cool, though- I’m currently the only person on this entire planet. I’m currently the only *botanist* on this entire planet, which means, logically, I’m the best botanist in the world. Suck it, Dream. He can’t say the same because even though he’s our chemist, I still don’t know how he got his degree. Not to mention the fact that Sapnap is probably a better navigator than him. So, I’m just sort of better by default.”

He runs a hand through his hair again. “I don’t even know what I’m saying. I’m just rambling. Dear diary, today I almost died and then got abandoned on a hostile planet.”

He stops.

“Fuck. I need to figure out how I’m going to survive.”

He pauses the recording again. *Okay, George, you can do this*, he thinks. He has to do it. For his crew, if not for anyone else. He is not going to be the first person to die on Mars. He is *not* going to be the first person to die on Mars.

There’s enough food for six people for fifty days. That’s three hundred days of food, which he can easily stretch out by just eating less. There, one problem solved. There are plenty of EVA suits for when he inevitably needs to leave the Hab and go out on the planet. Okay, fine. Water- water is going to be a more difficult problem to solve, but it’ll be okay. It’ll be fine. Communications-

He checks everything. It’s all down. There’s literally no way to get in contact with Earth, no way to get in contact with the *Hermes*, no way for anyone to know that he’s still alive and kicking.

Well. Fuck.

“Sol 7!” George announces to his new best friend, his video diary. He’s still wearing Dream’s sweatshirt. There’s a bit of a manic look in his eyes. “Guess what? I’m literally a botanist, and we have a shit ton of potatoes here! Commander, I take back everything I’ve ever said about you and your potatoes, because these babies are going to save my fucking life. I’m going to figure out how to farm on Mars. I’m going to fucking colonize Mars!”

“Sol 8. This is going to be harder than I thought.”

“Sol 10. I need to figure out how to get the damn radio working. I need to figure out a way to tell everyone I’m still alive. My whole life literally relies on it. Listen- Ares IV touches down thirty-two hundred kilometers away, four years from now. If I can get myself over there by that time, they’ll be able to pick me up and rescue me. So I just need to survive until then.

“The oxygenator is fine, so I’m not going to suffocate. The water reclaimer is fine, so I won’t die of thirst. I think- and thank you, Dream, for saving my life here- I think I figured out a way to manufacture water from leftover rocket fuel. I take back everything I’ve ever said about you being a horrible chemist. So I won’t starve to death. My only issue is that I can’t fucking communicate with Earth, and I’d really like to be able to do that.”

“Sol 26. A very productive day, if I do say so myself. I’ve got a shit ton of soil in the Hab so I can grow my damn potatoes. Mars is a lot nicer when it’s not trying to kill you, I think. I’ve also started modifying our rover so it’s able to get me over to the Ares IV landing site.

“And... I miss my crew. Jesus, I miss them so much. I miss Sapnap’s stupid jokes, I miss Puffy and Niki’s mothering, I miss Techno’s death stares, I miss Dream’s... I miss Dream. I miss them so fucking much, and I can’t even imagine what they’re going through, thinking they left me for dead here. I can practically imagine them losing it when they find out I made it twenty sols past what they thought. At least. I’m planning on making it a lot longer.”

“Sol 27. I don’t know how much longer I’m going to last. Pigstep, Techno, really? The only music you brought was Pigstep? If I have to listen to this song one more time-”

Pigstep plays in the background. George sighs and looks at all he’s done. In a few short weeks,

he's gone from the brink of death to mostly self-sufficient. He did blow himself up once trying to convert the rocket fuel into water, but that one really wasn't his fault. He blames Dream and his stupid chemistry equations.

Jesus. Dream. He misses Dream. He knows that they had their little game for such a long time, dancing around each other, pretending they weren't hopelessly in love, because two crew members together could endanger the mission. They all just suffered through listening to Sapnap talk about his boyfriend-turned-husband, while Dream bumped his shoulder against George's.

He takes a few deep breaths in, then out. He needs to keep himself calm. He's had enough panic over the past few weeks, always when the cameras are off, because he's not going to let his crew see him cry. Hell, he's not going to let the rest of the world see him cry, because God knows how many people NASA's going to release his video logs to when they eventually find them.

Unless they just cover it up. He wouldn't put it past them to do that, either.

He wonders how Bad is handling it, the *Hermes* flight director, one of his best friends. Probably not well. Fundy's probably having a field day with the media. Wilbur's probably fending off how many reporters trying to cancel any other Ares missions.

No. Ares IV is going to land, and they're going to pick George up, and he'll be reunited with his crew back on Earth. Everything is going to be fine.

That's what he keeps telling himself. This is fine. He's going to be fine. He's going to make it.

He doesn't have any other choice.

Hermes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The ship is quiet.

It's been three weeks since they left Mars, three weeks since George's death. Dream doesn't think he's smiled once in all that time. To be fair, he hasn't really interacted with anyone, either- his sister would call him melodramatic, but he thinks it's warranted. It's not like he's a grieving widower, but he certainly feels the part.

They all mourn in different ways. Puffy does the same maintenance checks over and over again. Sapnap spends all of his free hours in the gym, usually with the punching bag. Techno is even more somber than usual, a desolate figure floating through the halls. Niki is ignoring her own feelings by attempting to get them all to take care of themselves. Dream knows they're all just attempting to distract themselves, except maybe for Techno- he knows Techno feels the brunt of the loss, because as the mission commander, he feels like he's responsible.

He's not. Mars is responsible. God, Dream fucking hates that little red planet. He hates the mission and NASA and outer space and himself and the whole crew, only because none of them could do anything when it came down to it. None of them could stop that satellite from flying, none of them could stop the dust storm, none of them could do anything but watch as the MAV left Mars's atmosphere.

Dream himself has spent all his time locked in his room. Occasionally, someone will knock on the door in an attempt to get him out, but he feels like he can't even function. It's on the dawn of the fourth week that Techno is finally the one to pound on the door.

"You're our navigator," the Commander's gruff voice says. "So come navigate." He opens the door, and Techno is already floating down the hallway. Dream gives a feeble attempt to straighten himself up before floating after him.

They're all waiting for him in the navigation room, which he doesn't really think is necessary, but he appreciates the way Puffy pulls him into a hug nonetheless. Dream's known her for a long enough time that he jokingly calls her 'mom,' a fact that's only solidified by the way she squeezes him tightly and then presses their foreheads together. As she pulls back, Niki rests a hand on his arm.

“Have you been eating?” she asks. “Sapnap and I have been leaving food outside your door.” He grimaces, and she takes this as a no, which is the truthful answer. Grabbing Puffy’s hand, the two float out of the room, probably to go and get Dream some food. He appreciates them endlessly- all of them. They’re all in mourning, and they’re still finding time to take care of him.

Jesus, he needs to pull himself together. But that’s difficult to do when he witnessed the love of his life die.

Because yeah, he loves George (*loved*, his brain tells him, and he pushes back the past-tense because he doubts even death could change how he feels). They were best friends and Dream was head over heels, and he thinks George was the same, even if neither of them were going to act on it. And if he had just reached out a little faster, held on a little tighter, maybe George would be on the *Hermes* with them-

“Dream,” Techno says stiffly. “Get out of your head. That’s an order.”

Dream jerks up out of habit when he’s addressed and nods quickly. Techno raises one eyebrow.

“Stop blaming yourself,” Sapnap mutters, floating over so he can wrap an arm around Dream’s shoulders. “It wasn’t your fault.” He turns to Techno with a harsh look. “And it wasn’t yours either, Commander, I could give you your own advice.”

Techno scoffs and mutters something about how Sapnap’s advice never turns out well before disappearing out of the room. Dream huffs as Sapnap forces him to take a seat, then sits next to him. He’s starting to see their elaborate ploy to get him to talk to Sapnap.

He and Sapnap are best friends, and have been ever since they were young. They said they were going to become astronauts together, go to the stars and beyond. It was pure luck that they were both chosen for the Ares III mission, but Dream wouldn’t change it for the world.

Except for right now, where he’s sort of wishing the mission had never happened. If Niki had stayed in Germany and Puffy had kept her place in mission control and Techno had remained on the International Space Station. Maybe he and Sapnap and George could have gone to the moon and then they’d all still be alive.

“Tell your brain to shut the hell up,” Sapnap snorts. When Dream looks closely, he can see that Sapnap’s eyes are red-rimmed, and he looks like he hasn’t slept in a long time. “It happened,

Dream. It's over. I loved him too."

"Not the same way," Dream croaks out, and he can feel the tears welling in his eyes, as if he hasn't cried enough already. Sapnap reaches out and Dream practically falls off of his chair and into his brother's arms. "I just-"

"I know, Dream."

"I hate it."

"What?"

"Mars. Space. Everything."

He's loved space his whole life. He's wanted to be an astronaut since he was a kid, for God's sake, he worked his ass off to rise through the ranks at NASA to be invited into the Ares program. And now that he's here- he never wants to see it again, never even wants to think about the galaxies and comets and stars that he's always loved. Because what good were they when George died?

"Sol 37. The Hab is, technically speaking, a bomb. Seriously, one wrong move and the whole thing explodes. Kind of cool, right? All I have to do is play Pigstep one too many times and the radio overheats and bam, I'm dead. Just kidding, I don't think that's a thing that could happen. I dunno, Dream and Puffy and Sapnap are the ones that made the explosives during our test run. No matter who Wilbur blames, that one wasn't on me."

God, George thinks, those were the times. When the crew was trapped for a month in the little bubble, preparing for the mission, getting to know each other in an alien environment. And yeah, the explosion was a little bit his fault, but he wasn't the one who made the explosives, so he stands by that it wasn't on him.

The blame ended up being pinned on Wilbur, anyways. Big fancy Director of Mars Missions, he's the one that took the blame. After him it would've fallen on Techno, and even though the Commander was always willing to step up and take responsibility, Wilbur saw how good the crew worked together and didn't want to risk Techno being fired.

Those were the good days. Back when George didn't need to worry about food and water and surviving on Mars. Alone. When everyone else thinks he's dead.

The gash in his stomach has been aching. It's probably time to take the stitches out, but he hasn't been able to bring himself to look at the wound yet. Niki would yell at him for not taking better care of himself- hell, they would all yell at him for not taking better care of himself- but he feels like he has bigger things to worry about than a little tear in his stomach.

"Anyways. The Hab is technically now a bomb. I am currently hiding in the rover while I come up with a plan, mostly because I don't want to accidentally kill myself. My math was, to say the least, incorrect. Listen, I'm a botanist. And yes, technically speaking, I'm also an engineer, but I'm mainly a botanist. I don't do the math stuff.

"“Oh, but George,’ you say. ‘You have a degree in engineering. Surely you can do math.’ You need to keep in mind that I’m gay. I can’t do math.”

He pauses. Did he really just say that out loud? Sure, the crew knows- hell, two-thirds of them are queer- but it's not like he's gonna just announce that to the world when anyone could find these video diaries.

Alright, he thinks, logically, if someone were to find the videos, he'd probably be dead. So.

"I cannot believe this is how I'm coming out," he announces. "Anyways. My math was wrong. Sucks to suck. I'm going to find a solution, and if I don't, well, now you know that I died in a massive fucking explosion and not a dust storm. Now you've got something to blame when they don't find my body."

He takes a bite of food and chews noisily, mostly because he's beyond caring at this point. He holds eye contact with the camera the whole time, just because it's so funny, and God does he need a little bit of humor. When he's done chewing, he swallows harshly, and the food gets stuck in his throat. He coughs, and then bursts into a fit of laughter.

"Maybe Mars won't kill me," he says. "Maybe it'll just be me being stupid." It's fine. It's whatever. He'll be okay. He stares out the window at the Hab as he finishes his food, and then he turns back to the camera. "I'm gonna find a way to fix the Hab."

“Sol 40. Fixed the Hab. I’m going to have a proper meal now and maybe try and listen to something that isn’t Pigstep. God, I fucking hate Pigstep. No offense, Techno, but seriously, your music taste is awful. It’s not like anyone else’s is much better- Sapnap and Dream know what I think of their music. Niki’s is pretty alright. If anyone is listening to this- stop listening to Pigstep. It’s not good. It’s almost as bad as disco. You hear me?”

“Sol 41. I ran diagnostics on all the systems again, and everything was good. Of course, I decided to not wear a suit, and my own dumbassery almost got me killed. Again. So, I guess I have to start making smarter decisions, because I don’t have the rest of the crew here to yell at me when I’m about to fuck things up.

“Anyways. I caused another explosion and then cleaned up my mess. Which is, like, totally fine. It’s fine. I’m fine. I’m back in the Hab, no longer sleeping in the rover, which I see as a complete win. Absolutely nothing went wrong. Nope. Not at all.”

“Sol 42. Just doing some more post-explosion clean-up. I slept in today, which I think I deserve. Most of the outside of our station is cleaned up too, so who knows. Maybe things will start going my way. We can only hope.”

“Listen,” Phil Watson, the Director of NASA, says seriously to Wilbur Soot, Director of Mars Missions. “Davidson’s body is going to be completely visible in any images of the Ares III site.”

“Oh, you’ve gotta be kidding me,” Wilbur replies, running a hand through his hair. “That’s why you’ve been denying my requests for satellite imagery? Because you’re worried about seeing a dead body that we’ve known about for two months now?”

“I’m saying that these images are gonna be released to the public,” Phil corrects him. “And the media obsession with his death has just died down. We don’t need to go stirring up the public again. Not to mention the whole *Hermes* crew is gonna be able to see those images, and you heard them give their public eulogies. I don’t think any of them can handle it.”

“So we don’t transmit them the images,” Wilbur offers. “Is that so hard? I want to see my mission site.”

“I know you do, Wil. But then they’ll see the images ten months from now when they get back.”

“Phil, listen. I have sympathy for the Ares III crew. You *know* I do. But I’m also a businessman, and there’s almost an entire mission’s worth of supplies up there. We already have plans for four and five. But if we say Ares 6’s partial purpose is recovering George’s body- well, we’ll get public sympathy. We’ll get approval. We won’t get that if we wait. The wounds are still fresh.”

Phil looks like he’s considering. Wilbur considers it a win- once Phil starts considering his ideas, the answer usually ends up being a yes. Perfect. Maybe he can go home early tonight.

“Fine,” Phil says. “You know what- take it to Tommy. Have him get you the images.”

Score.

It takes him maybe twenty minutes to get his younger brother on the phone, and when he finally does pick up, it sounds like he’s been sleeping. “A master’s degree and I’m working in an all-night photo booth,” Tommy complains immediately.

“This is a work call.”

“Fuck.”

“That means watch your language, Tommy. I’m authorizing satellite imagery of the Ares III site.”

“Oh. *Oh*. You mean-”

“Yeah. You’re gonna see the body. Try not to throw up, or something. Call me if you need anything.”

He hangs up the phone and closes his office for the night, then walks to his car. God, he’s exhausted. It’s been a long, long two months since the disastrous end of the Ares III mission, and he’s already starting work on Ares V, which doesn’t even take off for another decade. He’s already

drunk enough coffee today to last the entire week, so maybe he'll have a nice tea when he gets home and try to relax.

Wilbur's just started his car when his phone rings. Annoyed, he glances down and sees it's from Tommy. Probably complaining about having to look at an impaled body. Wilbur presses the red button and puts the car in drive.

EMERGENCY is the text that comes through, from Tommy, of course. Wilbur sighs and calls him back.

"Tommy Innit," he says. "This better be an actual emergency-"

"It is," Tommy says, out of breath, and he sounds terrified. "Get in here. Now."

Tommy Innit is a glorified camera operator. Sure, he loves his job, and he loves NASA, and he loves the fact that his whole family works here so he gets to talk to all of them regularly (excluding Techno, who is currently several million miles away). And he loves being able to look at pictures of space on the regular. What he does not love, however, is looking at images of the Ares III site and seeing several things that are not correct. And he does not love pulling up the Ares III mission logs and realizing that they are not correct for a reason.

"Okay," Wilbur says, bursting into the room. "What's the issue?"

Tommy starts pulling up images rapid-fire, pointing out things that are out of place. Wilbur has explanations for all of it, ranging from the Commander ordering it to the wind blowing it out of the way.

"Okay," Tommy says slowly. "Except for the fact that I checked the mission logs. Like, four or five times. Maybe more. Techno didn't report any of that, and you know how he is when it comes to documenting everything. He wouldn't have forgotten stuff like that."

"Wind?" Wilbur offers. He looks like he thinks he should have gone home. Tommy shakes his head. "What are you saying, Tommy?"

Wilbur knows what he's saying. He just doesn't want to be the one to say it.

"Did I mention that I can't find his body? Like, anywhere?"

Wilbur and Tommy hold eye contact for approximately six seconds, and then Wilbur pulls out his phone.

"Phil? Yeah. You still here? You're not gonna like this. No. Yeah. Get down to Tommy's. Like, now." Tommy spins in his chair a few times and starts laughing hysterically. It's that or probably start crying. Jesus, he thinks, the press is going to have a field day.

Wilbur is evidently thinking the same thing. He dials the number for his (jokingly) adoptive son Fundy, the Director of Media Relations.

"Hey," he says. "You're going to hate this. George is alive."

There's ten seconds of silence, and then Tommy hears Fundy screaming through the other end of the phone. Tommy's laughter doubles. God, this is so fucked up.

When Phil arrives and they explain the situation, he chucks the mug of coffee he's holding across the room. Weakly, Tommy asks, "Are you going to clean that up?" Phil gets a murderous look on his face, and Tommy thinks if Phil hadn't already thrown the mug, it would've been thrown at him.

Fundy gets there thirty minutes later, dressed in his pajamas, looking stressed beyond belief.

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me," he cries. None of them even bother correcting him for his language in a professional setting. "No, no way- not that I'm not happy, but-"

"This is on you, bud," Wilbur says, patting Fundy on the back. "Come up with a media statement."

"You can't tell me what to do," Fundy replies snarkily.

"Come up with a media statement," Phil repeats, and Fundy groans. Tommy tries not to laugh. He

feels like he's not even supposed to be here- even though they're his family, they're all important. He is, decidedly, not.

"Fine," Fundy says. "Fine! I'll alert the news, I'll prepare the press statement. Goddamn it, why are you putting all the backlash on me? I fucking hate reporters!"

"You're the director of media relations," Tommy points out. "Why would you take the job if you didn't like reporters?"

"Because it's fucking NASA!" Fundy cries, and he storms out of the room. Wilbur and Phil are still for only a moment before darting after him, leaving Tommy with the images showing that George Davidson is not dead.

"Nice speech," Wilbur snorts exactly twelve hours later. He's sitting in Phil's chair, feet on the desk. Phil and Fundy both look like they want to hit him. He doesn't blame them. He knows he's being purposefully antagonizing, but he deserves a little bit of joy. Bad, the *Hermes* flight director, found out that George is alive when everyone else did, when the press conference premiered a few hours prior, and Wilbur's not looking forward to having that conversation.

"Thanks," Phil replies, equally as dryly. "Get out of my fucking seat."

"Whatever you say," Wilbur says, standing up. He ruffles Fundy's hair, and Fundy elbows him in the stomach. "Good job, kid."

"I'm not a kid," Fundy replies. "My phone won't stop buzzing." He pulls it out and sets it on Phil's desk, as if to prove his point.

"Put it on Do Not Disturb," Phil suggests.

"It already is," Fundy replies.

Wilbur can't help but laugh. He thinks that he's not going to sleep for a very, very long time. The concluding words of Phil's speech echo in his mind. "*We're not going to stop until George Davidson is home on Earth or confirmed dead on Mars.*"

And sure, Wilbur is a businessman, and he knows that getting George home will save NASA's ass. But he's also friends with George. He's not going to rest until George is home, both for the sake of NASA and more so for the sake of the astronaut himself. He wonders what George is thinking.

"Sol 61. Why the fuck can Aquaman control whales? They're mammals."

"Sol 63. I'm not longer in danger of constantly blowing myself up. The Hab is no longer a bomb. Yippee! I have enough water to grow all of these goddamn potatoes- like, 600 litres. That's a lot of fucking water. Of course, I'm going to need that much if I'm going to survive until Ares IV.

"Which means it's time I start thinking long-term. And by thinking long-term, I mean finding a way to communicate to NASA that I'm alive. It's been, like, two months by now, so hopefully they've got satellite images by now, and maybe they'll realize that things are a little out of place. And yeah, there's a chance they'll just pin it all on the wind, or other storms, or Techno not recording things, but Bad and Wilbur know, they *know*, that Techno logs everything, and he bullied us into logging everything.

"So. Here's my thought. If I connect the two rovers, I'll definitely be able to make it to the landing site for Ares IV. Perfect. But then it comes to the challenge of actually connecting the two rovers, which I don't think we have an operating manual for. We have a manual for the rovers, I mean. We don't have one for putting the two together. I'm an engineer, though. I'll figure it out."

"Sol 66. I decided to start going on missions. In the spirit of NASA, I decided to call my set of missions Asteria, after the goddess of the stars- mostly because I could never get Dream to shut up about the stars.

"Jesus. Dream. I miss Dream. If I do end up dying on one of these missions- Asteria 1 was aborted after about an hour- I should probably get some record of my life going. For the Wikipedia page, you know? I figure I'm pretty famous on Earth right about now. So. A bit about me."

There's a very long pause.

"I realized I don't actually know anything about myself that's worth putting in a Wikipedia page,

other than the fact that I might be the first person to die on Mars. I've got my two parents, who live in Brighton. Um. I've got a cat that I just call Cat. Dream thinks that's a fucking stupid name, but he named a cat Patches and his name is literally Dream, so I don't think he's the leading expert in what good names are.

"I can talk about my relationships with the crew. God, I love the crew. Niki is our flight surgeon, and she tries to teach us all how to take care of ourselves, mostly because we're all awful at it. That year on *Hermes* on our way to Mars, I probably learned more about taking care of myself than in all the other years of my life, seriously. Niki's one of the kindest people I know, you know, my only other fellow European. We became pretty good friends in training before the mission actually started.

"Puffy isn't technically a doctor, but she's one hell of a scientist. She's a fighter, certainly, probably the most physically fit out of all of us, and she's a living icon. One time, during training, we were out at a bar, and she ended up getting us kicked out. It totally wasn't her fault that she slammed a guy's head into a table, he was making moves on Niki. Anyways, I love Puffy, fucking incredible, definitely the mom friend of the team.

"Sapnap- God, Sapnap's one of the best friends I've ever made. I love Sapnap and his stupid penchant for fire and his love of rocket fuel and everything else he does. Even though we act like we hate each other, we love each other, I promise. Any videos of us may say otherwise, and I'm never going to live this down after he hears it, but I love Sapnap more than words can describe.

"Techno is the most incredible Commander I've ever had. I've done a lot of things with NASA and worked under a lot of people, and Techno's gotta be the best of the best. He's serious, dedicated, and I couldn't ask for a better person to work under. I know he's going to be blaming himself for everything, so Techno, if you're hearing this- it's not your fault. I promise.

"As for Dream-"

He's crying by now, and he cuts off with a choked sob. "As for Dream, well. I already came out on camera, so. I've known Dream for five years, and I'm pretty sure I've been in love with him for four. And I know, deep down, that he loves me back, but- you know. We were on a mission together. We couldn't do anything that would compromise that. But I love him, more than anything in the world, in a different way than I've loved anyone else. I really do."

He takes a few deep breaths. "I think that's enough for today. Um. If anyone is out there, if anyone is listening- this is George Davidson, Sol 66, signing off for now."

if you enjoyed, considering leaving a comment or kudos! it's free, and it means the world to me

Asteria

Chapter Notes

the plot progresses! all my irls on spotify definitely saw me listening to 'pathfinder' from the martian soundtrack on repeat but it's fine

the ending part of this chapter (the pathfinder log) comes directly from the book, in case anyone was wondering

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What the muffin do you mean, you didn’t want to wake me up?!” Bad practically screeches. Wilbur sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. It’s been a few weeks since the initial press conference, and Bad is still full of rage. As the *Hermes* flight director and Ares III coordinator, he’s good friends with the entire crew. Normally he isn’t prone to anger, but right now, he’s furious.

“It was late at night,” Wilbur says, looking for an excuse. This is the first time the two of them have come face-to-face with how busy they’ve both been, so Wilbur’s now getting the full force of Bad’s anger. He’s just digging his own grave at this point, and he knows it. “I didn’t want to bother you.”

“And you couldn’t have called me in the morning?” Bad demands. “Jesus, Wilbur! This is sort of wake-me-up news! Or at least tell me before you announce it to the whole world!”

“Well, you’re here now,” Phil offers. Bad casts him a sharp glare.

They’re in the conference room on the highest floor of the building, waiting for the director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory to arrive. Tommy is sitting in one corner, fidgeting with his hands nervously. Fundy is standing by the window, talking rapidly on his phone. He sets it down when the Director of JPL strides in, briefcase in hand.

“I have a flight back to Pasadena in three hours,” Alex Quackity announces. “Let’s make this quick.” He takes a seat across from Phil and then glances toward Tommy. “Who’s that?”

“Tommy Innit,” Tommy says nervously. “I work in SatCon.”

“Why is he here?” Quackity demands, turning to Phil. Wilbur answers for him.

“He’s the one who figured out George was alive. I put him in charge of keeping track of him.”

“Huh. Alright.”

They talk science for a while, what the public knows and doesn’t know. At one point, Phil turns to Tommy with a grin and says, “Welcome to the big leagues.”

Wilbur feels a burst of pride. This team- they’re going to get George home.

“We need to tell the *Hermes* crew,” Bad says eventually, running a hand through his hair.

“No,” Wilbur says immediately. “Not until we have a rescue plan.”

“Are you kidding me?” Bad cries. “They’re his crew! His best friends! They need to know, they can’t go on thinking he’s dead-”

“We can’t give them false hope, either,” Wilbur points out.

“I’m their coordinator, it’s my call to make,” Bad says sternly. “Not yours.”

“I’m sorry, Bad, but I’m with Wil on this one,” Phil interrupts. “We need to wait to inform them. They need to stay focused on getting themselves back to Earth.”

“Bull,” Bad snorts, crossing his arms, but he doesn’t argue further.

There’s more discussion on what JPL needs to do- Quackity tells them all that his employees won’t be thrilled with what’s being asked of them in such a short time frame.

“It’s that or leave George to die,” Wilbur points out, and that’s the end of that.

“Sol 68. I figured out a way to make the rover suitable for long-distance trips. It involves something even more dangerous than turning the Hab into a bomb. I’m going for the RTG. You know, the big box of plutonium that’s more dangerous than the shit they put in nuclear bombs. I figure it shouldn’t be that difficult, right?”

“Sol 69. Ha ha, funny number. Asteria 2 was today. I’m no stranger to Mars- I’ve been here for a while- but there’s something different about being on Mars and unable to see the Hab. It’s a completely alien landscape. It’s like-

“I was about to say it’s like being on a different planet, and then I remembered that it literally is. I am literally on a different planet. I am the only one on this entire planet. God, this is so fucking depressing.

“Anyways. I found the RTG right where we buried it, four kilometers away, only instead of avoiding it, I made a beeline for it. Probably not what Techno had in mind, but hey. He’s not here to stop me. I declare Asteria 2 to be a complete success. Tomorrow will be Asteria 3, which is just Asteria 1 but without freezing my ass off. I’m going to go vandalize the rover now.”

“Sol 70. Asteria 3 was also a success. I drove around a hundred kilometers and did a quick EVA out of the rover to change the batteries about halfway through. I wonder what NASA would think of me fucking with the RTG like this. They’d probably be scared. My power is unmatched. I’ve gotta be the stupidest person in the universe- or maybe the smartest.

“I’m going to start planning for Asteria 4- not sure what it’ll be yet, but I’ll figure something out. I wonder if they’ve figured out I’m alive yet.”

“Sol 71. I figured out what Asteria 4 is going to be, and it’s gotta be one of the best ideas I’ve ever had. And I’m starting now.

“I’m going to find *Pathfinder*.

“For those of you who don’t know, *Pathfinder* was an old NASA project from ‘97, headed by the

JPL. Shout out to the JPL! Hey, guys. Anyways- it fell silent a long time ago, but it's close by. If I can get it up and working, I can try and find some way to communicate with NASA. Especially if the guys back home figure out what the hell I'm doing. So- here we go, team. *Pathfinder* is pretty far away, so this trip is going to take a while, but I'm determined to make it a success."

It's nine pm, and Wilbur is starting his seventh cup of coffee of the day. He's in the middle of composing three different emails to various Congressmen, trying to convince them to provide emergency funding. There's been hardly any interdepartmental fighting, which is rare, and he makes sure to emphasize that point in the emails.

NASA as a whole has pulled together to make sure saving George Davidson is our first priority. However, everything we're doing costs money. With the amount of public interest...

His head falls downward, and he snaps it back up. He can't fall asleep now, he needs to send out these emails and then write a few more, then prepare what he's saying tomorrow on CNN's George Davidson report, and then-

"Wilbur?"

He jerks up. Tommy is standing in the doorway, laptop in hand. He's wearing the same sweatshirt and sweatpants that he's been wearing since the conference room meeting a few days prior.

"Yeah," he says, gesturing at the seat across from his desk. "Come in, what's-"

"Sorry to bother you this late," Tommy says, not taking a seat. "But he's on the move."

"He's what?" Wilbur asks.

"George is on the move."

"Any chance it's like the other day's trip around nowhere?"

“He’s been going in a straight line away from the Hab. Drove for several hours, did an EVA to change the battery, drove for several more.”

“Fuck,” Wilbur curses softly. “There’s no way he’s going for Ares IV now-”

“No,” Tommy agrees. “Ares IV is southeast. He’s going southwest.”

“Jesus,” Wilbur says, trying to wrack his brain for anything George might be doing. He still has no idea what the guy’s thought process could possibly be. “What’s he doing now? Like, right now?”

“Recharging, I think. Probably sleeping. He’s not moving at the moment.”

“Alright. Keep me updated, Tommy. Maybe he’ll turn around tomorrow.”

“Yes, sir.”

With that, Tommy leaves him with his coffee and his computer.

Wilbur ends up sleeping in the office. He manages to straighten himself up for the drive to CNN to talk on the George Davidson Report, which has been airing daily. He’s been talking on it on a weekly basis, trying to keep things under control. He’s speeding and nearly gets pulled over on the way back to NASA, but the police cruiser gets distracted and Wilbur slows down a little bit.

He’s just made it back to the office when his phone rings, a scheduled call from Quackity about how they’re planning on communicating to George that they’ll be dropping in supplies. Once he’s certain they have a solid plan in place, Wilbur thanks Quackity and hangs up the phone, then turns to his inbox. There’s nearly a hundred emails, most of them marked as important, but there’s one on the top from Tommy with no subject that jumps out at him right away:

He’s on the move again.

Wilbur makes his way down to SatCon, sending emails on his phone as he goes.

“Same line,” Tommy announces when Wilbur enters the room. He glances up from his phone to see his little brother staring at the monitors, tracking George’s location. “Still heading away from the Hab. He’s a hundred and seventy-six kilometers away.”

Wilbur stares at the screen for a moment, then narrows his eyes.

“No,” he says. “No way.”

“What?” Tommy asks nervously. Wilbur grabs his hand and tears out of the room at a jog. “Where are we going?”

“SatCon break room!” Wilbur cries, speeding up to a run. “You still have that big map of Mars hanging on the wall, right?”

“Yeah,” Tommy says, looking confused. “Wilbur, what-”

“Here!” he cries, skidding into the room. He glances around for a straight-edge and ends up grabbing an empty doughnut box from on top of the trash bin. Snatching a sharpie from a jar, he marks George’s position and then draws a straight line.

“Oh my God,” Tommy says, covering his mouth with one hand. Wilbur grins.

“Yes!” he says. “He’s going for *Pathfinder* ! Oh my God, this changes everything!”

“If he gets it up and running-” Tommy starts.

“We can communicate with him,” Wilbur says excitedly, pulling out his phone and dialing Quackity’s number quickly. “And of course he can fix it, he’s an engineer, that’s what he *does* - Quackity! We’re catching the next flight to JPL. George is going for *Pathfinder*. I know, I know- yeah, we’ll see you soon!” He turns back to Tommy with an exhilarated grin. “Oh, that clever son of a bitch!”

“Sol 75. My fourth day on the road. I’ve established somewhat of a daily routine, and honestly, it’s boring as fuck. I don’t know how I survived the year-long journey to Mars- oh, wait, yes I do. It was because I had the crew with me.

“Maybe if I tell stories about the crew, it’ll pass the time better. I could burn my way through Techno’s collection of old DVDs- seriously, Tech, Leave It to Beaver? That shit’s *old*, man- but honestly, I’m not that desperate yet.

“So- since after either my death or rescue, these records will eventually, hopefully, be found, I’m going to embarrass the shit out of my best friends. Let’s start with Techno, because I feel like the Commander needs to be brought down a notch.

“And hey, Commander, if you’re seeing this: I know I’ve been making fun of your shitty tastes for weeks now, but I’m just not gonna give you a break.

“So, everyone knows Phil Watson, esteemed director of NASA, but what they *don’t* know is his penchant for adopting lost orphans. Case in point: Wilbur Soot, Director of Mars Missions. Tommy Innit, this barely-out-of-college kid that works in SatCon. And, of course, our dear Commander Technoblade. It’s kind of funny, honestly, seeing them all together, because even though none of them look even remotely like each other- Wilbur and Tommy could not be more opposite, but they’re both tall bastards, and Techno’s got his bright pink ass-length hair, and Phil is Phil- they look like a picture-perfect family. Or maybe not picture-perfect, they’re chaos incarnate.

“Anyways, the point is: the crew was having family dinner, where we all got our families together, which means Phil, Wilbur, and Tommy were all invited. Needless to say, Tommy and Techno started a full-on food fight that ended with this skinny-ass kid shoving Commander Technoblade’s head into a bowl full of mashed potatoes. Puffy has a picture, I think, and she’s been using it as blackmail ever since. We can’t get her to send it to any of us, though, which is a bit disappointing.

“There’s the embarrassing story for today. God, I miss Earth. I miss my crew. I miss my family, and NASA, and being able to walk outside without wearing a spacesuit. Sorry, I didn’t mean to make this depressing. Sol 75, George Davidson, signing off.”

“Sol 79. Eight days into Asteria 4. The rover is charging for the night, and I’m about to go to bed. God, am I exhausted from my routine of doing nothing. I half take-back what I said about Leave It to Beaver, it’s actually vaguely entertaining. I can see why Techno enjoys it, at least.

“I was thinking about Karl today. I don’t even know why. Karl is Sapnap’s husband- they got

married approximately three weeks before we left in a spur-of-the-moment thing that only the crew and a few other select people were invited to.

“When I say spur-of-the-moment, I mean we were out at a bar, piss-drunk- Techno was our designated driver, so he was sober, per the usual- and Sapnap decided he didn’t want to wait until after the wedding to call Karl his husband. And Sap was too drunk to find his phone, so we called Karl off Dream’s, convinced him to come to the nearest church, and they were married. Just like that.”

George can see his reflection in the camera, and he can see the fond smile on his face. He misses his best friends, both on Earth and on the *Hermes*. He misses a lot of things. Nothing he can do to change that now, though- just find *Pathfinder* and hopefully get in contact with some of them.

He wonders if they’ve realized where he’s going by now. Hopefully they have. Wilbur’s smart, he should figure it out pretty quickly.

“I’m going to sleep for the night, I think. Talk to you on Sol 80.”

“Sol 81. I’m twenty-two kilometers away from *Pathfinder*! One more day, and then I’m there.”

He takes a deep breath. He’s farther away from the Hab than he’s ever been, and the nerves have been starting to get to him for the past few days. If he can’t find *Pathfinder*, then this whole mission has been for nothing.

No, not for nothing, he reminds himself. Now he knows that he can make long-distance trips in the rover. He can make it to Ares IV. He’ll be ready when the time comes.

“Sol 82. Absolute victory! I’ve got both the lander and the Sojourner rover in my possession, making me the first person to ever recover a probe on Mars. God, I’m so cool- my Wikipedia page is going to be stuffed full of firsts. I was the seventeenth person to walk on Mars, and then the first person to be on a planet alone. The first person to colonize Mars. The first person to create water on Mars. The first, first, first. God, I love this.

“That’s a complete lie. I’d much rather be on *Hermes* with the crew. But again, I don’t blame any of them.

“I digress. I’ve got the lander and the Sojourner, both recovered. The Sojourner is small enough to fit inside the rover. The lander is not. I don’t even need the whole thing, just the probe, which I successfully got off the rest of the console. Now it’s the matter of getting it up onto the roof of the rover, two meters off the ground.

“This shit’s gonna kill my back. Therefore, I’m putting it off until tomorrow.”

“Sol 83. I got the probe on the roof of the rover, easy peasy. It was not. It was not easy peasy. But I did it, and I’m going to be so fucking sore tomorrow, but it was worth it.

“I had to construct a ramp out of rocks to get it the two meters up, which meant a lot of testing to find the right angle for a ramp and meant a lot of rocks. Luckily, if there’s one thing that Mars has an abundance of, it’s rocks.

“And I was successful! Which is pretty cool. A lot of physical labor, so I’m tired, but luckily I’m going to spend the next eleven days sitting in a rover and only leaving to do EVA walks to change the battery. But that means I’m going to be heading back to the Hab soon, which means one day closer to walking around without a spacesuit on. Watch out, Mars, George Davidson is on the move!”

“Sol 85. I am so fucking sick of space food. What I wouldn’t give for a hot meal.

“I’m also really sick of shitting in a bag. Because of course I need my shit for manure, since I’m the only source of shit on the planet, currently, which, hey. Another first. First person to be the only source of shit on a planet.

“God, I hate my job.”

“Sol 90. I decided to start collecting rocks. The geologists will love me. I’m just out here doing cool astronaut things, being a cool astronaut and shit. Look at me go. God, I love my job.

“I should be back at the Hab soon. Hopefully. It took me around ten days to get to *Pathfinder*, and it’s been seven since I started the return journey. I’m almost through Leave it to Beaver. I’m

disappointed, almost, but I guess I'll have plenty of time to rewatch it."

"Sol 93. I got the Hab signal today! Less than twenty-five kilometers away, which means I'll be back by tomorrow. Then I can get started on fixing the giant broken radio I've been dragging around with me.

"I've been thinking a lot about what my first words to NASA are going to be. Probably something along the lines of 'are you receiving this.' But like. After that. Probably something for my parents. Something for the crew. Something for my cat. And a general fuck-you to the public, just because I can.

"Seriously, though. I want them to know how grateful I am. And how I'm going to be wanting a lot of things at NASA named after me. I better be getting some good fucking pension after this."

"Sol 94. Home sweet fucking home! I nearly cried when the Hab came into view, like one of those white people clapping when the plane lands. I wasn't going to cheer, but then I remembered that I'm the only one on this planet, so there's no one to judge me.

"Except for whoever's watching this. Hello. I'm one of those stupid white people that claps when planes land and cheers when my rover makes it back to my Mars survival habitat. Please be kind in your judgement and remember I'm under a lot of stress.

"Asteria 4 was a complete success, but I needed to get rid of the RTG. Because if that blew up, it would kill me to death. So I drove it the recommended four kilometers and buried that shit back where Techno originally put it. I'll go back for it when I need to get to Ares IV, but that still won't be for a while.

"Anyways. That was Asteria 5. I wonder what Dream will think of the name- I did do it for him, after all. I think the Asteria missions are done, but maybe the next time I need to do a series of missions, I'll call it Selene. For the moon. I think Niki would like it. Or maybe Helios, for the sun, Sapnap would love that shit.

"I dunno. I'll be here for a while. I'll probably get to use both."

George takes a deep breath- God, does the air of the Hab taste wonderful- and stretches. He frowns when his shirt rides up, exposing the long scar on his torso, and tugs it back down. He clears his

throat uncomfortably.

“Tomorrow I’ll get to work on fixing the lander and getting Sojourner up and running properly. Hopefully, I’m counting down the days in single-digits until I’m able to communicate with someone for the first time in God knows how long. For now, George Davidson, signing off, Sol 94.”

“He’s back!” Tommy cries, bursting into Wilbur’s office. He freezes, realizing Bad, Phil, and Fundy are all standing inside. Quackity’s face is on Wilbur’s computer screen, frowning slightly at Tommy’s outburst.

“Did you not get my email?” Wilbur asks. Tommy shakes his head.

“I’ve been checking the satellites non-stop,” he says defensively. “Like you told me to. He’s back, he’s in the Hab.”

“Good,” Phil says. “Hopefully he’ll start working on *Pathfinder* tomorrow.”

“The second we have communication, I’m telling the crew, I don’t care,” Bad growls, looking immensely frustrated.

“Thank you, Tommy,” Wilbur says softly. “Now, sit down. We’re talking developments.”

“Developments?” Tommy asks.

“We’ve got people ready to receive the *Pathfinder* signal, but we don’t know how long it will take for him to fix the machine,” Quackity says. “I’ll be back in Houston by tomorrow, now that he’s back at the Hab. I’m assuming there weren’t complications?”

“I can’t see the Sojourner, I’m assuming it’s inside, but the lander is outside the Hab,” Tommy confirms. “Or at least, the bits of it that he recovered. There was no way he was tugging the whole *Pathfinder* back to the Hab.”

“Right, we expected as much,” Quackity confirms. “Be ready, guys, the press is going to go crazy.”

“I know,” Fundy mutters. “Believe me, I know. Speaking of- Quackity, how would you feel about appearing on CNN?”

“No,” Quackity says cheerfully. “Good luck with that!”

“Wil, how’d the Congressmen take those emails?” Phil asks. He sounds exhausted. Tommy doesn’t blame him. The guy hasn’t slept at home in nearly a week, and neither has Wilbur.

To be fair, Tommy hasn’t, either. He’s just been taking naps in his SatCon room, constantly monitoring the satellites for images of George and whatever shit he’s getting up to.

“Loved ‘em,” Wilbur replies. “We’ve got the funding, they’re working on passing it now. Everyone wants to unite to get George home.”

“Excellent,” Phil says. “Quackity?”

“Iris space probe is coming along nicely,” Quackity responds. “We should be able to deliver plenty of food, easily enough for him to survive until Ares IV, with room for extra so the guy can become, I dunno, less malnourished.”

“Great,” Phil says. “Alright. Meeting- meeting adjourned. Everyone get ready. I want us up and moving the second *Pathfinder*’s signal comes in.”

“Sol 95. The lander should be fixed. All I need to do now is wait for it to get up and running.”

“Sol 96. Lander still isn’t working. Sojourner still isn’t working. All I can do is hope.”

Pathfinder LOG: SOL 0

Boost sequence initiated

Time 00:00:00

Loss of power detected, time/date unreliable

Loading OS...

VXWare Operating System (C) Wind River Systems performing hardware check:

Int. Temperature: -34 C

Ext. Temperature: Nonfunctional

Battery: Full

Higain: OK

Logain: OK

Wind Sensor: Nonfunctional

Meteorology: Nonfunctional

ASI: Nonfunctional

Imager: OK

Rover Ramp: Nonfunctional

Solar A: Nonfunctional

Solar B: Nonfunctional

Solar C: Nonfunctional

Hardware check complete

Broadcasting Status

Listening for telemetry signal...

Listening for telemetry signal...

Listening for telemetry signal...

Signal acquired...

Chapter End Notes

comments/kudos/subs/etc are always, always appreciated!!!

find me on [twitter](#)!

Iris

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Sol 97. It worked. Holy fuck, it worked! The high-gain antenna is angled directly at Earth, and *Pathfinder* has no way of knowing where Earth is- which means it’s them controlling it remotely! They know I’m alive!”

He’s out of breath, excited- no, *thrilled*. Earth knows he’s alive. His crew knows he’s alive, NASA knows he’s alive, he’s getting off this damn planet. He can talk to someone. He’s going to be okay.

“I don’t even know what to say. This worked. This shit *worked*. I spent nearly a hundred sols being the loneliest man in history and it’s finally over, because I have someone to talk to again. And sure, they might not rescue me, but I won’t be alone.

“I don’t know what I was expecting when I finally got in contact with someone- maybe I’d jump in the air for joy, or something. Instead I sat down in my EVA suit and cried. I’m not ashamed to admit it, either, it was a very emotional moment for me.

“Anyways. I’ve got important things to do. I’ve got people to talk to!

“The plan is this: I’m assuming they’re going to take a panoramic, since that’s about all they can do. So, I’m going to post a sign asking if they’re receiving, and then a space for them to answer yes. Foolproof. Let’s see how it goes.”

He turns off the camera and slips the EVA suit back on. Yeah. Foolproof.

“Sol 97, again. They said yes. They said yes! They received my message! God, communication is so fucking slow, but for now all we get is yes or no questions every half an hour. I’m working on setting up a different system- ASCII. It’s what computers use to communicate, each character with a numerical code between 0 and 255- and the only reason I know this is because Puffy’s computer is a wealth of knowledge on the topic. Thank you, Puffy.

“So- values go with letters and numbers and yada yada. I can’t put the twenty-six letters of the alphabet for them to point at, that’s too many and too little of a degree shift to be noticeable, so we’ll go with ASCII. That’s way less cards, and a lot easier to deal with.

“I’ve got my little sign here- Spell with ASCII. 0-9, A-F at 21-degree increments, and other instructions for getting them to communicate with me. Here we go.”

He logs down the messages- they ask for his status, and he tells them that he doesn’t have any physical problems at the moment. He makes sure to tell them that nothing is the crew’s fault. The next question they ask is how he’s alive.

Impaled by an antenna fragment. Bio-monitor computer destroyed by puncture. Crew perfectly reasonable in thinking I was dead. Not their fault.

It’s not their fault. It’s not his fault. It’s fucking Mars’s fault. It’s *not* the crew’s fault.

They ask about his crops. He tells them it’s extreme botany.

W E S A W S A T L I T E, they tell him.

The government is watching me with satellites? I need a tinfoil hat. & we need faster communication.

They tell him to bring the Sojourner outside, which he does, and then they tell him they’re working on it. Great. He tells them to resume communication in the morning, his time.

Tell my parents I’m fine. Give the crew my best. Tell Commander Technoblade that Pigstep sucks.

Wilbur runs a hand through his hair. He’s fucking exhausted, trying to come up with solutions to all of these problems, half of which he isn’t even equipped to deal with. He’s got a temporary desk at JPL that’s even more disorganized than his desk back in Houston, which is saying something.

“Excuse me?” someone asks, knocking on the doorframe.

“Quackity’s on the third floor.”

“I’m- I’m here to talk to you, Dr. Soot.”

“Yeah,” Wilbur says, downing the rest of his coffee. “Sorry, I was up all night. You are?”

“Jack Manifold, sir,” the man says. “I work in software engineering. We have an idea for communication.”

“I’m all ears.”

Jack goes on a ramble about *Pathfinder* that Wilbur half listens to, but his ears really perk up when Jack says, “*Pathfinder* has two communications systems- one for us, and one for Sojourner. We can change the second system to broadcast to the Ares III rover frequency.”

“You mean- you can get *Pathfinder* talking to George’s rover?”

Because it is, now, isn’t it? George’s rover. That shit stopped being NASA’s the second they figured out George had been surviving up there all on his own.

They talk for a while longer about how it’ll work- they send George about twenty different instructions, and that’s that.

“Just like that?” Wilbur asks, looking for confirmation one more time.

“Just like that,” Jack confirms.

“Jack, I’m going to buy your entire team autographed *Star Trek* memorabilia.”

Jack doesn’t miss a beat. “I prefer *Star Wars*, actually.”

“Of course,” Wilbur says with a grin, and Jack turns to leave. Holy shit. Holy shit. They’re going to get in faster contact with George, everything is going to be alright-

His phone rings. He’s got it set to do not disturb, which means it’s one of four people calling him. Grabbing it from off his desk, he sees that it’s Fundy.

“Hello?” he says, trying to sound cheerful.

“I need a picture of George.”

“Hi, Fundy. Nice to hear from you too, Fundy. How’s Houston, Fundy?”

“Cut the shit, Wilbur. I need a picture.”

“It’s not that easy.”

“You’re talking to him with a fucking camera. How hard can it be?”

They argue back and forth for another five minutes, and Wilbur promises to try and get the picture the next day. Fundy hangs up the phone with an extremely sarcastic, “I’ll be looking forward to it.”

Jesus. Sometimes, Wilbur really hates his job.

“Sol 98. Today’s message was the following-”

He holds up his notepad with the message written down:

CNHAKRVR2TLK2PTHFDRPRP4LONGMSG.

“Which, yeah, took me a hot second to figure out what that was, too. ‘Can hack rover to talk to *Pathfinder*, prepare for long message.’ Awesome. Awesome. And the message was *really fucking long*, a bunch of instructions on how to get *Pathfinder* to communicate with the rover, but hey, I think it worked. Then they asked me for a picture of me, for publicity, or something.

“So I stood outside for twenty-two minutes in my EVA suit and flipped off the camera. I’m sure Fundy and Wilbur will love that one.

“I’m sure I’ll get to hear all about it tomorrow. When, hopefully, we’re able to communicate way, way faster, and in full sentences and shit! Here we go!”

[11:18] JPL: George, this is Wilbur Soot. Are you receiving this message?

[11:29] DAVIDSON: Wilbur, man, I’m gonna be real honest with you, I’ve missed your stupid face. Or at least, your stupid words. How long have you known I was alive?

[11:41] JPL: Sol 49. The whole world’s been rooting for you. We’re working on rescue plans-adjusting Ares IV’s MDV to do a short overland flight. They’ll pick you up. We’re putting together a supply mission to keep you fed until then.

[11:52] DAVIDSON: Glad to hear it. Really looking forward to not dying. I want to make it clear that nothing was the crew’s fault. How’d they react when they found out I was alive? Also, hi mom & dad!

[12:04] JPL: Tell us about your crops. We estimated your food packs would last until Sol 400. Will your crops affect that number? As for your question: they haven’t. We haven’t told the crew you’re alive yet. We wanted them to concentrate on their own mission.

[12:15] DAVIDSON: Crops are potatoes, grown from the ones we were going to prepare on Thanksgiving. Thanks, Techno. They’re doing good, but I’ll run out of food around Sol 900. Also: tell the crew I’m alive! What the fuck is wrong with you?

[12:26] JPL: We’ll get botanists in to ask detailed questions and double-check your work. Your life is at stake, so we want to be sure. Sol 900 is great news. It’ll give us a lot more time to get the

supply mission together. Also, please watch your language. Everything you type is being broadcast live all over the world.

[12:37]: DAVIDSON: Look! A pair of boobs! -> (.) (.)

The crew of the *Hermes* is all gathered on the bridge, waiting for their transmissions from Earth to come through. The mood is somber, as it has been every time they've done their media pick-up- they still feel guilty, getting messages from their loved ones, when they know that George isn't with them.

"All personal emails have been dispatched to your laptops," Puffy announces. "There's a voice message here, too, addressed to the whole crew..." She trails off, looking to the Commander.

"Play it," Techno orders. Puffy shrugs and opens the message.

"*Hermes*, this is flight director Bad. I hope you're all doing well."

"Bad?" Sapnap asks. "Talking directly to us without CAPCOM?"

Techno holds up a hand, clearly signalling for silence. Sapnap shuts his mouth.

"I have some news. There's no easy way to go about saying this: George Davidson is still alive."

"What?" Niki breathes out. Sapnap stands up and slams his hand down on the table. Puffy is staring, mouth agape, and Techno puts his head in his hands.

Dream doesn't move.

"I know that's a surprise," Bad's voice continues. "And I know you'll have a lot of questions. We're going to answer those questions. But for now I'll just give you the basics."

“Fuck this,” Sapnap mutters. Puffy stammers out something unintelligible. Dream still isn’t moving.

“He’s alive and healthy. We found out two months ago and decided not to tell you; we even censored personal messages. I was *strongly* against all of that. We’re telling you now because we finally have communication with him and a viable rescue plan. It boils down to Ares IV picking him up with a modified MDV.

“We’ll get you a full write-up of what happened, but it’s definitely not your fault. George stresses that every time it comes up. It was just bad luck. He also...

“He also talks about you guys a lot. He misses you, and he loves you. He was outraged when he found out we hadn’t told you all. So... take from that what you will.

“And take some time to absorb this. Your science schedules are cleared for tomorrow. Send all the questions you want and we’ll answer them. Bad, out.”

The message ends.

“He’s alive,” Niki breathes out, breaking into a grin.

“He’s alive,” Puffy echoes, turning back to the rest of them.

“Holy shit,” Sapnap says, shaking his head. “Holy fucking shit. They didn’t tell us.”

“I left him behind,” Techno mutters.

“Commander-” Niki starts. “We all left together.”

“No, you were just following orders. I left him behind, in a barren, godforsaken wasteland, I-”

“Commander,” Dream says, moving for the first time, making direct eye contact. Something passes between the two of them. “We all left together.”

“George has stressed it isn’t our fault,” Niki says, repeating what Bad said in the message. “Which means blaming ourselves is going to get us nowhere.”

“We need to focus on the fact that he’s *alive*, ” Puffy agrees. “That’s something incredible.”

“Yeah,” Dream says, swallowing down the bubbling feeling in his gut. “Incredible.”

“Sol 114. Now that NASA can talk to me, they won’t shut the hell up. It’s kind of annoying, honestly. They’ve got an entire team of people trying to micromanage my crops, as if I’m not the best fucking botanist on this planet. Seriously, I’ve been keeping myself alive for this long, so I must be doing something right.

“I have been getting a ton of emails, though, which is pretty cool. Like, actors, athletes, musicians, and the fucking president cool. And from my mom. God, I read the email from my mom, like, fifty times, and I only cried the first ten.

“They still won’t let me talk directly to the crew, though, which is kind of disappointing. Maybe someday. They want all of us to stay focused on what we’re supposed to be doing, which is keeping ourselves alive, so. You know. I kind of get it.

“That’s a lie. I don’t get it. I hate it, actually. I hate all of this. I miss Earth. I miss listening to music that isn’t fucking Pigstep. They can send me emails, but they can’t send me music files, which means more Pigstep for me. God, I’m gonna give Techno *such* a hard time about this when I’m finally allowed to talk to him.

“The only downside to all of this is that even though they can send transmissions from Earth to Mars, they can’t send them the extra ten feet to the Hab, which means I need to don my EVA suit five or six times a day to go and collect my emails. But hey, I’m not complaining.

“I’m also learning Morse code, as a back-up communications system, which is a fun thing to learn. That was sarcasm. It’s kind of a shitty way to communicate, making dots and dashes with rocks.

Hopefully it won't come up."

"Sol 115. The meddling botanists have reluctantly admitted that I did a good job. Suck on deez, Wilbur, that's what you get for trying to regulate my crops. He didn't like my message to the botanists, and emailed me to prove it.

"Anyways, they finally let an email through from *Hermes*. I cried. God, I've been crying a lot lately. At least the tears are a good water source for my potatoes.

"That was a joke. Okay, a half-joke."

Davidson-

The crew is thrilled to hear you're alive. As the person responsible for your situation, I wish there was more I could do to directly help. But it looks like NASA has a good rescue plan. I'm sure you'll continue to show your incredible resourcefulness and get through this.

Okay, is NASA done reading now? You're not supposed to be getting contact from anyone in the crew other than me, so technically if they pass messages through me, it's allowed. Sapnap says if you die now, he'll kill you. Niki's impressed you haven't died yet, from a medical standpoint. Puffy claims she knew it all along. Dream... is Dream. You know how he is. He took your loss harder than any of us, I think, and he's scared. We all are.

We're cheering for you, George. Looking forward to buying you a beer back on Earth.

-Techno

Techno, pure bad luck is responsible for my situation, not you. You made the right call and saved everyone else. Get them home and I'll be happy.

Tell Sapnap he can suck a fat one. Niki, I'm more resourceful than I look. Commander just told me

I have “incredible resourcefulness.” Puffy... nice try. And Dream... tell Dream I miss him, please. I miss all of you, but him especially. And again, it was none of your faults.

I will take you up on that beer, though.

-George

George,

Some answers to your earlier questions:

No. I will not tell our botanists to “go fuck themselves.” Once again, your messages are being broadcast live around the globe. Please, at least try and have a little class.

Once again, we can’t get you any new music. Sorry, your request for “Anything, oh God, ANYTHING but Pigstep” is denied.

Also, side note- NASA is putting together a committee to see if there were any mistakes made when you were left behind. Just a heads-up. They may have some questions for you.

-Wilbur

Wil,

Tell the investigation committee they’ll be doing their witch hunt without me. No one is at fault, and when they inevitably blame Commander Technoblade, be advised I’ll publicly refute it, and I’m sure the rest of the crew will, too.

-George

“Sol 116. Time for my second potato harvest. Good, Martian-grown potatoes. Can’t wait.”

“Sol 117. The water reclaimer is acting up. I’m perfectly chill about it. Is it a problem? Sure. Is it something to be freaked out about? Not really.

“NASA is absolutely shitting themselves. To them, this major equipment malfunction is a cause of extreme duress. To me, it’s just another goddamn Tuesday. If it turns into an actual problem, I’d deal with it, normally. I’m a fucking engineer, for Christ’s sake. But NASA wants to give me solutions and have me try them and then report back and it’s a lot of back and forth. God, I hate my job.”

“Sol 118. God, I love my job.

“My conversation with NASA today went something like this-

“‘Me: I’m going to take the water reclaimer apart and check the internal tubing.’

“‘NASA, after about five hours of deliberation: No, don’t do that, you’ll fuck it up and die.’

“So I took it apart.

“It worked. I was right. There was an issue with the internal tubing. So I told NASA what I did, and their response was basically just, ‘Dick.’ Which, not really surprised.”

“Sol 119. I woke up and the Hab was shaking. Which really isn’t good. There was clearly a sandstorm, which is bound to have some problems, right?

“Oh my God, you have no fucking idea.

“The airlock blasted itself off the Hab. Like, forty meters back. Thank god I was wearing an EVA suit, or I would have fucking died instantly. As is, my potato plants are fucking dead, which is bad fucking news.

“So at this point, I was sitting there like, fuck this! Fuck the airlock, fuck the Hab, fuck the whole planet, this is it! I’m at my *fucking* limit!

“Then I got to work fixing the problem. Like I always do. Jesus, they better give me some good fucking medals back on Earth after all the shit I’ve gone through.

“Fun fact: some of the stuff I attempted was exactly how the Apollo 1 crew died. No disrespect to the dead, but I did not die. Go, me.

“Anyways. I’m going to go and roll the airlock forty meters back to the Hab. Wish me luck.”

“Sol 120. Oh my God, my back fucking hurts. I slept in the rover last night, and I’m probably going to do it again tonight. Still fixing the airlock. I’m not an engineer for nothing.”

“Sol 121. Made some real progress. Going to fix the Hab tomorrow. Too tired to talk.”

“Sol 122. The Hab is fixed. The potatoes are dead.

“Fuck, basically. I have enough food to last until Sol 600. NASA’s restock isn’t going to be here until Sol 856.

“I’m dead.”

[08:12] DAVIDSON: Test.

[08:25] JPL: Received! You gave us quite a scare. Satellite images show complete detachment of Airlock 1- is that what happened?

[08:39] DAVIDSON: If by “detachment” you mean “shot me out like a cannon” then yeah. All good. Other than the fact that I’ll start starving to death on Sol 584. Anything you can do about that? Also, who’s watching my satellite imagery?

[08:52] JPL: Working on a solution to that right now. Tommy’s on the satellites, he’s the one that figured out you were alive. He appreciated the giant rock penis a few weeks ago. Hab systems status?

[09:05] DAVIDSON: Mostly unharmed. Running checks on anything that might have been affected now. I’m still talking to Wilbur, right?

[09:18] JPL: Yep, Soot here.

[09:31] DAVIDSON: Systems are all good. Let me know if you come up with a way for me to not starve.

[09:44] JPL: Will do.

“Alright, people!” Quackity announces. “It’s Sol 122. We have until Sol 584 to get a probe to Mars. That’s four-hundred and seventy-five days. The trip’s going to take four hundred and fourteen days. Mounting the probe to the booster and doing inspections will last thirteen days. Which gives us forty-eight days to make this probe.”

The room is not pleased to hear this. It’s not like Quackity feels any better.

[08:02] JPL: We’ve got a solution for getting you food, been in progress for about a week. It’ll be tight, but we can do it. Keep us posted on any mechanical or electronic problems. The name of the probe is Iris, Greek goddess who traveled the heavens with the speed of wind and was the messenger for the gods. Also the goddess of rainbows.

[08:16] DAVIDSON: No complaints here. Gay probe coming to save me, got it.

[08:31] JPL: George, you're going to come off as homophobic.

[08:47] DAVIDSON: Houston, be advised, I'm a homosexual. This is the first planet to ever be occupied by only the gays.

[08:59] JPL: Duly noted.

Tubbo Underscore sips his coffee in the silent building. It's nearly four in the morning, and he's exhausted. He's an astrodynamacist, for God's sake, he shouldn't be here this late. But this time-God, this time, he's trying to save George Davidson.

He knows George. He likes George. He'd like George to come home alive, if possible. But that's difficult when a single day could make the entire difference for the course of the Iris probe, meaning he has to calculate about twenty different courses.

I'm just saying, Eret, he types out in an email to his boss. *It would almost be easier to just-*

Oh. *Oh.*

Tubbo grabs his empty cup of coffee and goes to the break room for a refill.

Eret makes their way down a little later.

"I think," Tubbo says, eyes wide, staring at his calculations. "Now would be an ideal time for me to take a vacation."

The day for the launch is upon them. Phil, Wilbur, Fundy, and Bad are all gathered in the office to watch. Bad leans closer to Wilbur.

“Do you believe in God, Wil?” Bad asks.

“Sure, lots of ‘em,” Wilbur replies.

“Ask them all for help with this launch.”

They shouldn’t be launching. They all know they shouldn’t be launching. But they’re behind schedule, and they’re desperate, so Phil gave the go-ahead. And now, here they are, listening to the voices over the radio. Bad, the flight director, slips his headset on.

“This is the flight director. Begin launch status check.”

Every question, he receives a “go” in return. Until-

“Houston, this is Launch Control, we are go for launch.”

“Roger,” Bad says. “This is Flight, we are go for launch on schedule.”

“Roger that, Houston. Launch on schedule.”

Wilbur crosses his fingers and prays to every god he knows. Fundy has his head bowed. Phil is standing stoic, upright, arms crossed, brows furrowed. They need this to work. They *need* this to work.

“Ignition sequence start.”

“Three... two... one... and liftoff of the Iris supply probe.”

“Trim?” Bad calls out.

“Trim’s good, Flight,” comes the response.

“Course?”

“On course. Altitude one thousand meters.”

“We’ve reached safe-abort.”

“Altitude fifteen hundred meters.”

“Pitch and roll maneuver commencing.”

“Getting a little shimmy, Flight.”

Bad glances at Wilbur, who shakes his head.

“Come again?” Bad asks.

“A slight shimmy. Onboard guidance is handling it.”

“Keep an eye on it,” Bad orders.

“Altitude twenty-five hundred meters.”

“Pitch and roll complete, twenty-two seconds till staging.”

“Shimmy’s getting violent.”

“How violent?” Bad demands. Wilbur is pacing. Fundy is sitting down, head between his knees. Phil hasn’t moved.

“More than we like. We’re still good.”

“Thirteen second till staging.”

“Flight, we’re getting a large precession!”

“What?” Bad asks, and lights and alarms start blaring across all the consoles. Wilbur curses loudly. Fundy is shaking. Phil isn’t moving.

“Force on Iris is at seven g’s.”

“Intermittent signal loss.”

“Ascent, what’s happening here?” Bad demands.

“All hell broke loose,” comes the response. “It’s spinning. Seventeen-degree precession.”

“How bad?”

“At least five rps, falling off course.”

“Can you get it to orbit?”

“I can’t get it at all.”

What follows is another minute of pure chaos, all other systems controllers confirming that they've completely lost the probe. Phil finally moves to replace the blue folder, praising a successful launch, with the red folder.

The launch has failed. They aren't getting food to George.

Wilbur checks his phone. A forwarded message from JPL- from *Pathfinder*. From George.

[16:03] DAVIDSON: How'd the launch go?

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always, always appreciated!!! :)

Elpis

Chapter Notes

i'm not going to lie to you i didn't proofread this. i did write it in one sitting though, thank you bcgc for encouraging me and sprinto my beloved for tracking my hour and twenty minutes straight of writing

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They've assigned George a psychologist. It's not something that he's completely thrilled with, though he recognizes that his mental state is very up in the air. He's mostly not thrilled with it because he has other, more important things to be doing, such as counting and recounting his food supplies, worrying about everything else that could go wrong, and marking down the days until his inevitable demise.

With the Iris probe labelled a failure, there's nothing they can do. He's going to starve to death on this little red planet. He could start eating rocks, or start starving himself now, but he doesn't really want to do either of those things. As it is, he's stretching his food sources thin, limiting himself to one meal a day. Even then, there's not much hope.

He's going to die on this planet.

Half of him thinks that he could just end it now, get it over with. But he can't do that. He won't. Maybe that's why Wilbur assigned him a psychologist, a kind woman named Alyssa who doesn't bullshit him.

So what, you might die? one of her latest emails reads. *For now, you're going to keep going, because there's something in this universe worth living for. What is it, George?*

And what is it? What's worth living for.

My crew, he writes in his reply. *My crew is worth living for.* Because even if they're gone, even if they're on the *Hermes* and he's on Mars, they're still his crew, just as he's still one of theirs. His crew is worth living for, his crew is worth making it another day on a planet that would decimate him if it was given the chance.

Good, Alyssa says. Write an email to each member of your crew. I know you're not supposed to be in contact with them, but I'll personally make sure that Wilbur delivers them.

Fuck. Fine. He'll write an email to each member of his crew, and God, he'll make them cry. Maybe that will be his personal goal to himself, to make the crew cry, because God knows he's cried enough over missing them. They've probably shed enough tears over him, too, but he can probably make them shed a few more.

Commander Blade,

I just want to reiterate that you did the right thing. You saved the rest of our crew, Techno. You've been keeping them alive, and you've been doing so well. I know you think it's your fault. I know you're going to blame yourself for everything. None of it is your fault. I promise you. I promise you. My death is not your fault. My blood is not on your hands.

Please remember that you need to keep living. You need to keep going. Even after I'm gone, when NASA tries to get up your ass about leaving me behind- know that it wasn't your fault. None of this was your fault.

And as much as I judge you for your tastes in food and music and entertainment and everything else, just know- I've enjoyed listening to Pigstep these past few months. It reminds me of you, and things that remind me of you are always worth it. You've been a fucking spectacular Commander and an even better friend, and don't you forget it.

I do regret that you won't be able to buy me that beer, though. Get one for the crew for me.

All my best,

George

O Captain My Captain Puffy,

God, Puffy. How have you been? I miss you.

But, now that I'm on my own and probably going to die, I can be honest with you. I know I can be honest with you. Hi. I'm in love with Dream. It feels good to get that out there where someone can hear it, and I know you're probably like oh, I knew it, but. You know.

That being said, I know you could call me a dumbass. Please don't. I swear I'd confess, if it weren't for the fact that my death is literally inevitable. Again, I know I can be honest with you, because I know you can take it.

Thank you for being there for me, throughout everything. Seriously. Take care of Dream for me. Take care of all of them for me.

Love,

George

Niki,

You are, genuinely, one of the sweetest people I know. That being said, you are also one of the scariest people I know. You could tell me to find a way to get off Mars and I would, just because I know you would commandeer a ship and fly here yourself for the sole purpose of killing me if I didn't. Hell, Niki, you know the whole crew would die for you, right?

I'm serious. Techno pulled us all aside at the beginning of the mission and said if anyone hurt you, we'd all be dead. Not because he'd kill us, but because you'd do it yourself, and then you'd let him at you. Not to mention that somehow every single person at NASA loves you. You've got the entire space program wrapped around your little finger. Use that power wisely.

Seriously, Niki. Thank you so much for being the bright star on the dark horizon. I know they're going to need that, now. Take care of yourself.

Lots of love,

George

Sapnap,

I could say some sappy shit about how you're my best friend, because hell, you probably are. But I'm going to cut to the chase here. I need you to talk to my parents when I don't make it back. I need you to let them know that I did my damn best, and I need you to let them know that they have my explicit permission to treat the entire crew as their children. I know they're going to want to.

Just... do that for me, will you? I don't have the guts to ask anyone other than my best friend. And I don't have the guts to write a message to them myself. I probably should. God, I miss Earth.

I bet you do, too. Tell Karl hi for me, yeah? Tell him I'm sorry I won't be able to make it to the big white wedding you eventually hold. Hold on to him tight and never let him go, you hear me?

Thank you, Sapnap. Thank you for everything you've done for me. Thank you for being my best friend. Thank you.

All my love,

George

Dream,

I've written and rewritten this letter probably fifty times. I keep typing it out and then backspacing because I have no idea what to say to you.

Isn't that weird? They're finally letting me talk to you, and I don't know what to say. I always know what to say when I'm around you.

I'll start with this: chemistry has saved my life more than a few times, which I hate to admit. And since most of my chemistry knowledge has come from you, you've saved my life more than a few times. Not to mention that it's been the thought of you keeping me going, lately. I can imagine the disappointed look you'd give me if I decided to give up. That thought keeps me going.

A lot of thoughts about you keep me going. Thinking of your little smiley-face tattoo, the one we stitched onto your first EVA suit. Your tea-kettle laugh, that fucking wheeze I thought meant you were dying the first time I heard it. The way your eyes look golden to me, even though I know they're green, and even though I should probably describe them as piss yellow. They've just always looked golden.

And isn't that something? That I'm on Mars, the red planet, and I can't even see the color red without those stupid color-changing contact lenses. I ran out of them probably eighty sols ago, and I haven't see the red dust trying to kill me in that long.

I haven't seen anything trying to kill me in that long, because every time I close my eyes, I only see you. It's always you, Dream. It's always you.

I think you'd probably be able to guess by now, and if not, someday they'll find my video logs, and I say it enough on there. I love you, Dream, more than anything in this world. More than anything in this universe. I'd do anything for you, even stay alive on a planet trying to kill me. I'd give you the moon and the stars and the sun. I know you like the stars the best, so: for you, the stars.

I love you, Dream. Don't miss me too much when I'm gone.

George

Phil listens to the phone held to his ear. The voice on the other end finishes what it has to say, then falls silent and awaits an answer. Phil stares at nothing in particular as he processes what he's just heard.

After a few seconds, he replies, "Yes."

Several minutes later, he hangs up the phone, then goes to his emergency contacts. Dialing up Wilbur, Quackity, Bad, and Fundy all at once, he sends out a message: *MEET NOW. FOUND A WAY TO SAVE GEORGE.*

“Okay,” Quackity says to the assembled heads of JPL. “Here we go again. You’ve all heard of the *Taiyang Shen* - the classified booster rocket being developed by the China National Space Administration- so I’ve got some good news. Our friends in China have given us one more chance to save George.”

There are cheers from around the room, and Quackity holds up one hand. Immediately, there’s silence.

“*Taiyang Shen* will be ready to launch in four weeks. If it launches on time, our payload will get to Mars on Sol 624, six weeks after George Davidson is expected to run out of food. NASA’s already working on ways to stretch his supply.

“Now- we made history when we finished Iris in sixty-three days. Now we have to do it in twenty-eight. There’s only one way to finish that fast- no landing system.”

“Sorry,” Jack Manifold speaks up. “What?”

“You heard me,” Quackity says. “No landing system. We’ll need guidance for in-flight course adjustments. But once it gets to Mars, it’s going to crash.”

“That’s fucking crazy,” Jack says, the rest of the table nodding in agreement.

“I know,” Quackity agrees. “But it’s what we’ve got.”

As soon as Tubbo explains what he’s discovered, Eret sends him directly to Wilbur Soot. He’s not nervous- he’s known Wilbur for a long time, so when he knocks on the door, Wilbur sends him a harried look.

“Dr. Soot?” Tubbo says, because they’re not really on first-name terms, he’s more just friends with Tommy and knows that Wilbur is basically Tommy’s brother.

“Yeah, Tubbo,” Wilbur says. “What can I do for you?” He’s staring at some papers on his desk. Tubbo’s heard about *Taiyang Shen*, of course he has, everyone has. But he thinks he has something even better.

“You can’t make a Mars probe in a month,” Tubbo says, dumping his armful of papers on top of Wilbur’s desk.

“We’re sure as hell going to try,” Wilbur snorts. He looks annoyed- no, pissed, that some guy from astrodynamics is coming up here and trying to order him around. Well, Tubbo is a fucking astrophysicist. He knows what he’s talking about.

“The *Taiyang Shen* is important, don’t get me wrong. But- well- here.”

He scatters the papers around and pulls out one, a summary sheet of what he’s been working on for days now. His vacation time is almost up. Now he’s handing his baby, his pride and joy, to the very man that might see her through.

Wilbur reads the paper. The closer he looks, the more his eyes widen.

“Are you sure about this?”

“Positive,” Tubbo confirms. “One-hundred percent.”

Wilbur purses his lips. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Project Elrond?” Fundy demands as he strolls into the conference room. “You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me. Who decided to make the meeting a *Lord of the Rings* reference?”

“It’s a secret meeting,” Wilbur says defensively.

“I couldn’t even tell Skeppy, according to the email,” Bad says with a nod. “What’s going on,

Wilbur?”

“I’ll explain once Phil arrives,” Wilbur says tersely. “Don’t worry, it’s good news.”

“Are we going to be making a momentous decision?” Quackity asks, rolling his eyes.

“We better be,” Phil says, strolling in. “I cancelled a phone call with the president for this. What’s up, Wilbur?”

“Hold on,” Fundy says. “Not even *Phil* knows what’s going on?”

Wilbur takes a deep breath as he gestures for them all to sit down. “One of our astrodynamicists, Tubbo Underscore, found a way to get *Hermes* back to Mars. The course he came up with would give it a Mars flyby on Sol 549.”

There’s complete silence in the room. Then,

“Are you shitting me?” Fundy asks.

“Sol 549?” Quackity demands. “How is that even possible? Even Iris wouldn’t have landed until Sol 588.”

“It’s... basically a slingshot,” Wilbur admits. “Using Earth’s gravitational pull, *Hermes* would have one hell of a velocity. It circles Earth, it intercepts *Taiyang Shen* with a supply of food to keep the crew on board fed, and then they pick up George using the MAV of Ares IV as they go past Mars again.”

“And what about the crew?” Fundy asks. “Would they have a problem with adding...” He does some quick math in his head, then swallows dryly. “...five hundred and thirty-three days to their mission?”

“They wouldn’t hesitate,” Bad says immediately. “Not for a second. That’s why Wilbur called this meeting.” He shoots a glance Wilbur’s way. “He wants us to decide instead.”

“That’s right,” Wilbur agrees. “It’s a life or death decision. It needs to be our call.”

“It should be Commander Technoblade’s call,” Bad insists. “He’s mission commander. Life-and-death decisions are his damn job.”

“Easy, Bad,” Phil says warningly.

“Bullshit,” Bad snorts, and the room goes quiet. Bad swore. Bad never swears. “You guys have done end runs around the crew every time something goes wrong. You didn’t tell them George was still alive, now you’re not telling them there’s a way to save him?”

“We already have a way to keep him alive,” Phil responds calmly. “We’re just discussing another one.”

“The *Taiyang Shen* crash-landing?” Bad snorts. “No way. No fucking way.”

“Bad,” Phil snaps. Bad shuts his mouth, looking furious. “Wilbur, would the *Hermes* be able to make it another five hundred and thirty-three days.”

“Easily,” Wilbur replies. “It’s the most expensive thing ever built. It was meant to run all five Ares missions.”

Wilbur and Phil go back and forth about the risks and the benefits for a while longer. Quackity quietly taps on the desk, frowning, his mind racing. Fundy follows the discussion like a tennis match. Bad, slowly, comes to a decision.

“How long do we have to make a decision?” Phil asks eventually.

“The window for starting the maneuver ends in thirty-nine hours,” Wilbur says.

Bad nods. That’s that.

“I’ve decided,” Phil says, twelve hours later. “No Tubbo Underscore Maneuver. There’s too much at risk.”

Fine, Bad thinks. If no one else is going to save George, he’ll do it his own damn self.

He yells at Phil for a moment, and Phil yells right back. It ends with Bad storming out of the room and slamming the door behind him, his mind made up, his decision firm.

Fundy, quietly, packs up his things.

“I was hoping he’d kick your ass,” Fundy says to Phil honestly. “If you had the balls- if any of you had the balls- we might be able to save George.”

And with that, he follows Bad out of the room.

“Puffy!” Dream calls down the hall. “I’m trying to download this fucking file and it’s not working!”

“On my way!” Puffy calls back, floating down the hall toward him. “Where’s the file?”

“In my shared space. The name is ‘kids.jpg’, which is weird, because I don’t have any kids.”

“Let’s take a look, then,” Puffy says with a grin, typing on her keyboard. “Looks like it got mangled in the download. Let’s see if I can get anything... hold on.”

“What?” Dream asks, running a hand through his hair. “This isn’t a jpeg. It’s a plain ASCII text file. Looks like... well, I don’t know what it is. Looks like a bunch of math formulas. Does it make sense to you?”

Dream is their navigator. Of course it makes sense to him. It’s a course maneuver for the *Hermes*,

labelled the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver, and he tells Puffy as much.

“What’s that?” Puffy asks. Dream shrugs.

“Never heard of it,” he says. And then he looks closer.

And closer.

Sol 549.

The stars begin to sing.

“...and then the mission would conclude with Earth intercept two hundred and eleven days later,” Dream finishes, wringing his hands together.

“Thank you, Dream,” Techno says. He gives them all a moment to digest- he’s already heard the Maneuver, and God knows he’s all for it. Now he just needs to see if the rest of the crew is as well.

“Would it really work?” Sapnap asks, his face expressionless, not daring to feel hope.

“Yeah,” Dream says, nodding. “I ran the numbers, they all check out. It’s a brilliant course. Amazing.”

“How would George get off Mars?” Sapnap presses.

“There was more in the message,” Techno says, leaning forward. “We’d have to pick up a supply near Earth, and George would have to get to Ares IV’s MAV.”

“Why all the secrecy?” Niki asks, frowning.

“According to the message,” Dream says, clearing his throat. “NASA rejected the idea. They’d rather take a big risk on George than a small risk on us. Whoever snuck it into my emails obviously disagreed, and my money’s on Bad.”

“So we’re talking about going directly against NASA’s decision,” Puffy says. It’s a statement, not a question- they all know it’s true.

“Yeah,” Techno says. “That’s exactly what we’re talking about. If we go through with this, they’ll have to send the supply ship or we’ll die. We have the opportunity to force their hand.”

“Are we going to do it?” Niki asks.

“We’re talking about mutiny,” Techno says. “I won’t lie- I want to do it. But there are going to be repercussions, for all of us. They can put Sapnap and I on military trial. They’ll never send the rest of you up to space again, that’s for sure. If we mess up the supply rendezvous, we die. If we mess up the Earth gravity assist, we die. We add five hundred and thirty-three days to our mission. Anything could go wrong. We could die.”

“Sign me up,” Sapnap says with a grin.

“Right,” Techno says with a nod. “We only do it if every single one of us agrees.”

“I’m in,” Dream says immediately, his gaze set, his face firm.

“Let’s do it,” Puffy says with a nod.

“If you think it’ll work, I trust you,” Niki says, nodding to Techno and Dream.

“Sounds like we have a unanimous vote. If we go for it, what’s involved?” Techno asks, turning to Dream.

“I plot the course and execute it,” Dream says with a shrug.

“I can disable the remote override,” Puffy says with a sly grin. “All I have to do is-”

“Hack into the code,” Niki says, smiling mischievously. She holds out a fist and Puffy bumps their knuckles together.

“Alright,” Techno says. “Looks like we can do it. We wait twenty-four hours, and then we enact it. If anyone changes their mind, let me know, and I promise I won’t say a word to the others. No one is being pressured into this on my watch.”

“We want to do it, Techno,” Sapnap says. “We want to save George.”

“We do,” Niki confirms.

“Alright,” Techno repeats, shrugging. “File out. We’re doing this thing. We’re going back to Mars.”

“Flight, CAPCOM,” comes a voice through Punz’s headset. Punz sighs.

“Go, CAPCOM,” he responds. Ponk is sitting across the room from him, but they have to observe radio protocol at all times.

“Unscheduled status update from *Hermes*. ”

“Roger. Read it out.”

“I... don’t get it, Flight,” Ponk says. “No real status, just a single sentence.”

“What’s it say?”

“Message says: ‘Houston, be advised. Tubbo Underscore is a steely-eyed missile man.’”

“What?” Punz asks. “Who the hell is Tubbo Underscore?”

“Flight, Telemetry,” another voice says, this one also across the room- Sam.

“Go, Telemetry.”

“*Hermes* is off course,” Sam says.

“CAPCOM, advise *Hermes* they’re drifting. Telemetry, get a correction vector ready-”

“Negative, Flight,” Sam tells Punz. “It’s not a drift. They adjusted course. Instrumentation uplink shows a deliberate rotation.”

“What the hell?” Punz demands. “CAPCOM, ask them what the hell.”

“Roger, Flight... message sent. Minimum reply time three minutes, four seconds.”

“Telemetry, any chance this is an instrumentation failure?”

“Negative, Flight.”

“Guidance, Flight,” Punz demands.

“Go, Flight,” comes the reply from Purpled, the guidance controller.

“Work out how long they can stay on this course before it’s irreversible.”

“Working on that now, Flight.”

“And somebody find out who the hell Tubbo Underscore is!”

Bad takes a seat carefully in the chair across from Phil, coffee in hand, looking completely innocent. “You wanted to see me?” he asks.

“Why’d you do it, Bad?” Phil asks, sounding more exhausted than ever.

“Do what?”

“You know damn well what I’m talking about.”

“Oh, you mean the *Hermes* mutiny?” Bad asks. “You know, that’d make a good movie title.”

“We know you did it,” Phil sighs. “We don’t know how, but we know you sent them the maneuver.”

“So you don’t have any proof?”

“Not yet, but we’re working on it.”

“Really?” Bad asks, raising one eyebrow. “Is that really the best use of our time? I mean, we have a near-Earth resupply to plan, not to mention figuring out how to get George to Schiaparelli for the MAV load-up. We’ve got a lot on our plates.”

“You’re damn right!” Phil snaps. “After you’re little stunt, we’re committed to this thing with no choice!”

“*Alleged* stunt,” Bad corrects. “I suppose Fundy will say we decided to try the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver? And he’ll leave out the mutiny part?”

“Of course,” Phil says. “Otherwise we’d look like idiots.”

“I guess everyone’s off the hook, then!” Bad says cheerfully. “Can’t fire people for enacting NASA policy. Even Techno is fine. What mutiny? And maybe George gets to live. Happy endings all around.”

“You may have just killed the whole crew.”

“Whoever sent those plans just passed a message. They’re the ones that decided to act. And there’s nothing we can do to change that now.”

“Sol 192. Holy shit. Holy shit! They’re coming back for me!”

George is jumping around the Hab like a giddy little kid, and he can’t stop himself. He’s just so fucking excited- they’re coming back for him. His crew is coming back for him.

There’s a whole plan and everything, most of which involves him completely disassembling the MAV that Ares IV was going to use and launching himself into space with barely a tin can around him. It’s risky as all hell, and the trip to the Ares IV launch site is going to be a lot longer than the trip to *Pathfinder*, but he’s going to do it. He’s going to fucking do it.

His crew is coming back for him.

NASA basically tells him he’s going to have to cut a giant hole in the hull of his rover. (Because it’s his rover, goddamnit, NASA doesn’t get to lay claim to the rover, not after everything he’s been through, not after Alyssa’s assistant Callahan manages to sneak an email through to him explaining the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver, how he heard from Skeppy who heard from Bad that NASA was going to leave him to die. How his crew made the decision to come back for him. They’re coming back for him!)

Wilbur gives him a lot of instructions about drilling a lot of tiny holes into the side of the rover. George isn’t particularly fond of the idea, because it’s very dangerous and he’s going to be playing with a lot of high-voltage power, but God, he’s already been doing so many dangerous things that it hardly matters anymore.

“Sol 193. Managed to not kill myself today.”

[10:07] DAVIDSON: Power line modification complete. Hooked it up to a drill, and it works great. Keep the instructions coming.

“They sent me a big long line of instructions again. God, I hate my job sometimes.”

[11:49] JPL: What we can see of your planned cut looks good. We’re assuming the other side is identical. You’re cleared to start drilling.

[12:07] DAVIDSON: That’s what she said.

[12:25] JPL: Really, George? Really?

[12:36] DAVIDSON: Bet Tommy loved that one.

[12:49] JPL: Just cut the damn hole, George.

“Sol 194. I continue to hate my job. I’m about one-fourth of the way through my cut. Or at least, one-fourth of the way through the drilling. Then I have to chisel out seven hundred and fifty nine little chunks. Yay!”

“Sol 195. Another batch of holes. At least I have encouraging messages from my good friend Wilbur Soot to cheer me on!”

[17:12] DAVIDSON: 357 holes total done.

[17:31] JPL: We thought you'd have more done by now.

“What a dick.”

[16:08] DAVIDSON: 131 holes today. 488 total. Minor drill issue; it tripped the breakers. There may be an intermittent short in the drill, probably in the attachment point of the power line. Might need to redo it.

[16:38] DAVIDSON: Have received no response. Last message sent 30 minutes ago. Please acknowledge.

[17:09] DAVIDSON: system_command: STATUS

[17:09] SYSTEM: Last message sent 00h31m ago. Last message received 25h17m ago. Last ping reply from probe received 04h24m ago. WARNING: 52 unanswered pings.

“Sol 196. I fucked up. I fucked up big time. Like, oh my God, I might actually die this time, big time.

“I followed all the instructions and everything, I double-checked everything, and- Jesus. Fuck. Fuck. Fucking fuck.

“Basically- the drill used too much power, and it got sent straight through the rover and into *Pathfinder* . It sent way, way too much power into *Pathfinder*. The breakers were fried.

“ *Pathfinder's* dead. I've lost the ability to contact Earth.

“I'm on my own.”

come vibe with me on [twitter!!!](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated! <3

Nyx

Chapter Notes

i didn't proofread this LOL enjoy

anyways i know it's dnf week but i wrote this in two hours so. it's getting posted. i am in the mood for some clout /lh

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Oh, you’ve gotta be kidding me,” Wilbur says as he reads over the report from Punz. Phil snorts and runs a hand through his hair, looking like he kind of wants to punch something. Or someone. “Bad, I’m assuming?”

“Nothing we can confirm,” Phil says. “I had a talk with him, he’s right, we can’t prove anything. I said if it was him-”

“You can’t fire him now,” Fundy says tersely, tapping quickly on his tablet. “The news has picked up on this like a bunch of leeches. They’re praising NASA and the *Hermes* crew, saying it’s one of the bravest things we’ve ever done. Some of ‘em aren’t happy, but a majority of the major sources are all latching on to the same story, talking about the Commander’s tough decisions. Overall, firing the *Hermes* flight director would just end in trouble. They’d find out about the mutiny.”

“Alright,” Phil grumbles. “So the mutiny doesn’t leave this room.”

“It goes nowhere,” Quackity confirms, looking bored. “We’re heading to Beijing tomorrow, right? Or is that today?”

“Flight leaves in three hours,” Wilbur says. “I thought you would have remembered.”

“You tasked my lab with building a probe in four weeks, sorry if my head’s a little scrambled,” Quackity mutters. “How’s George holding up?”

“Morse code came in handy,” Wilbur reports. “He managed to get us a message with rocks that Tommy picked up on, but we can’t contact him anymore. We just have to hope that any other problems that arise are problems he can solve on his own.”

“Great,” Quackity says. “I’m sure the news outlets were thrilled to hear about that.”

“They’re focusing on the positives, actually,” Fundy pipes in. “Surprisingly enough.”

“Yeah,” Phil snorts. “Surprisingly.”

“Sol 199. I’ve figured out how to get the atmospheric regulator and the oxygenator on the rover, and God, it’s something I never could have done with NASA breathing down my neck. I’m gonna use the fucking RTG. You know, the giant hunk of plutonium I dug up for my journey to *Pathfinder*? This box of pure radiation is about to save my life. Again. I’m almost disappointed I didn’t think of it sooner.”

“Sol 200. I’ve been here for 200 sols. Jesus H. I should probably be dead by now- hell, I should have been dead on Sol 6. I should have been dead a long time ago. But here I am, and I’m going to make it a few more. The only thing standing between me and my crew is many, many miles of travel on a planet that’s trying to kill me.

“Plus the whole launch myself into space with barely a tinfoil can around me thing. That’s the part I’m really not looking forward to. But hey, there’s a first time for everything, right? And I just keep checking them off the list.

“I’m gonna go haul some rocks around. Wish me luck.”

“Sol 201. I definitely did something to my back, because I woke up in pure agony. Thank God for Niki’s medical supplies or I’d just be lying around all day. Instead I drugged myself up and kept planning on how I’m going to make the rover suitable for long-distance travel.”

“Sol 207. Turns out the back issue was a little more serious than I thought, but today I managed to get out another message to NASA. I even drew a little dick in the dust to make Tommy laugh. I’m sure he’ll appreciate it.

“Hopefully, they’re still working on a way to save my life. Hopefully the crew’s able to get all the supplies, or else we’re all going to die, not just me.

“Fuck.”

“Sol 211. According to my calendar, the *Hermes* resupply probe is being launched from China in two days, if there weren’t any delays. If that screws up- the whole crew is fucked. So.

“I’ve been in mortal danger for months. I’m kind of used to it by now. Me dying? Not such a big deal. But the crew dying? Probably my worst nightmare.

“And I won’t even find out how the launch went until I get to Schiaparelli, the Ares IV launch site.

“If anything is listening- good luck, guys.”

George turns off the camera and leans back in his chair. Everything is dependant on this probe launching, everything is dependant on this resupply making it to his crew. Because yeah, he’s used to the idea of dying by now. He’s used to the thought that he won’t make it another day.

The crew isn’t. They’re safe aboard the *Hermes*, the most expensive space-shuttle ever built, where even if things go wrong, there are people available to fix them almost immediately, either on the ship or on the ground. But now, with this- anything could go wrong.

It can’t go wrong. It can’t. Because if it goes wrong- God, George doesn’t even want to think about what will happen if it goes wrong.

He sighs. There’s nothing he can do from here other than get himself to Schiaparelli, and even after that the only thing he can do is talk to NASA about what’s going on. So he’ll just have to pray to the stars that everything goes alright.

He starts wondering what he should call his next set of missions- the one to get the RTG, the one to get to the Ares IV MAV. Maybe he’ll call it Nyx, for the night.

“Sap? Am I getting through? Can you hear me?”

“Loud and clear, babe,” Sapnap answers. “Video link is solid.”

They’re finally close enough to Earth to be able to video chat in live-time, something everyone in the crew is immensely grateful for. They don’t have a lot of time, but they have some, and that’s what matters.

“They said I have five minutes,” Karl snorts. “But it’s nice to see you in real-time for a change.”

“I agree,” Sapnap says. “There’s barely a delay, this is- God, Karl. I miss you.”

“I miss you too. I wish you were coming home, but- you know, I’m glad that you’re going back for George. I’d probably be mad at you if you left him there.”

“Hey, hey, hey, we didn’t leave him there.”

“No, I know you didn’t. But he’s not going to stop giving you crap for it, you know that, right? The whole ride back is going to be him bitching at you, you’re all going to be waiting on him hand and foot because he can pull the *you left me on Mars* card.”

“Assuming we even get him back.”

“Don’t talk like that. You’re going to get him back.” It’s an order, and Sapnap grins. If Karl asked it of him, he would hang the moon, he would lasso the sun, he would capture the stars. Karl says get him back, and Sapnap’s going to do everything in his power to get George back. Not that he wasn’t already. “Hey, are you floating right now?”

“Yeah, the ship isn’t spinning. No centripetal gravity.”

“That’s sick as honk, dude. How’s the crew?”

“They’re all doing good. Worried. Dream, especially.”

“Oh, yeah, I bet he’s pining up a storm.” Karl gives him a knowing look.

“It’s not *that* bad,” Sapnap responds with a grin that says otherwise.

“I call bull,” his husband says. “I can feel him pining from here. The longing, Sap, it’s going to kill me, make it stop-”

“Oh, shush. Tell everyone I say hi.”

“I will. I love you, Sap.”

“I love you too, Karl.”

There are two people screaming at Puffy, both talking over each other, trying to shove each other to the side to get the better view on the camera.

“-and they weren’t even going to let both of us in, but then I told them I was *the* Tubbo Underscore and they had to let me pass,” her younger brother finishes with a breathless grin. Her older brother looks distinctly annoyed.

“Tell me again why you have to do an EVA?” Schlatt asks.

“I probably don’t,” Puffy responds. “I just need to be ready to in case something goes wrong.”

“And why does it have to be you?”

“Stop being overprotective, I’ll be fine. I’m the EVA specialist.”

“Yeah, sure. If you say so.”

Schlatt’s the only one in the family who hasn’t worked for NASA. He looks doubtful. Tubbo looks excited.

“I’m sure it’ll be fun,” he says. “And I know nothing’s going to go wrong.”

“Of course it’s not, kiddo. You’re saving George’s life,” Puffy says, beaming. She isn’t sure if the crew knows about her and Schlatt’s half-brother, but based on the way none of them have said a thing about the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver that might hint they know she’s related to the guy it’s named after, she assumes they don’t.

“Yeah, right,” Tubbo snorts. “I’m just doing some calculations. You guys are the ones that are saving him.”

“We’re going to do our best,” Puffy confirms. “I love you guys. Stay safe, yeah?”

“Sure thing, sis,” Schlatt says with a nod, ruffling Tubbo’s hair. “I’ll make sure he stays out of trouble for you.”

“It’s a little late for that,” Puffy replies with a grin.

“And what if the probe doesn’t get to you?” Ranboo asks. He’s pacing back and forth, and he looks like a worried mess.

“Try not to think about that,” Niki says calmly.

“I wish Mom and Dad raised us to be more selfish.”

Niki snorts out a laugh at that, and Ranboo presses his hand against the camera. Niki mimics the gesture, and it lets both of the siblings feel like they’re together, just for a moment.

“Why’d you have to get on a giant bomb that blasted you to Mars?” Ranboo wonders out loud. He’s in the astronaut training program, he’s one to talk.

“Technically, it was the nuclear-powered ion engine that took me to Mars,” Niki says, trying to deflect, and Ranboo huffs.

“I know that, Niki. But there’s something you’re not telling me.”

“Don’t worry about me, Ranboo. I’ll be fine.”

“You can’t be sure of that.”

“I- I can. Really.”

“Niki.”

Silence. The two stare each other down. Niki sighs.

“They have a plan.”

“Who has a plan? NASA, or Technoblade?”

“Techno told me about it yesterday. He picked me to survive, because I’m the smallest and I need the least food. If things go wrong, I’m the one that gets to live.”

“You mean...”

“We’ve got the necessary pills on board. It would be painless, and they’d take them right away so they don’t have to use up food.”

“Niki, there’s no way the supplies you have on board will last you the whole journey.”

“Ranboo, the supplies won’t be the only source of food.”

They stare each other down again. Ranboo doesn’t want to admit to himself what Niki is saying, she can see it in his eyes.

“Jesus,” he spits out eventually. “That’s…”

“I’m going to survive,” she promises, and there are tears in her eyes. “Don’t worry, Boo. I’m going to be okay.”

“Hey, Drista,” Dream sighs. He can already see the shit-eating grin on her face.

“You pathetic *loser*, oh my God, I knew you were going to find a way to go back for him! If you make it back to Earth and you haven’t told him how you feel, I’m going to take your cat *permanently*. ”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

“I would! Patches loves me more than she loves you! They wouldn’t let me bring her in here, but she says hello.”

“Did you… bring her to Houston with you?”

“Yeah. What about it?”

God, sometimes Dream hates his family.

“Nerd,” he tells her, in lieu of an actual response. She huffs and crosses her arms.

“Stay safe, okay?” she says, voice suddenly gentle. “I know that there’s a lot that could go wrong. And I know you care about him a lot.”

“Okay, stop talking,” Dream huffs. Sapnap, Puffy, and Niki all came out of their five minutes of individual time with red eyes and tear-stained cheeks- Dream isn’t going to be the same. He can already feel his eyes watering.

“No, I’m serious. You care about him, so fucking tell him that. He cares about you too, idiot. They broadcast his messages to JPL on all the news sources, none of that shit is private, you should see the way he talks about you. It’s like you created the stars.”

If Dream were powerful enough to create the stars, he’d be powerful enough to reach out and pluck George off that tiny red planet and hold him safely in his arms. As is, there’s already so much that can go wrong with this.

“Maybe when the mission’s over, Drista,” Dream says with a sigh. He tries not to think about the printed-off letter George wrote him that he reads every night before he goes to bed. He tries not to think about George’s written *I love you* and the fact that he still doesn’t know what it means. He tries-

“I’ve gotta go,” Drista tells him, and she looks... sad, almost. “Be safe, okay?”

“I will. Don’t get into too much trouble.” She fist-bumps the screen and then flips him off. Yeah, she hasn’t changed a bit.

“Phil’s furious.”

“Good.”

Tommy is the only one there to talk to Techno. To be honest, he wasn't expecting anyone to be there, after the stunt he pulled, leading a full-on mutiny against Wilbur and Phil. The whole crew knows it was Bad that sent them the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver, and they all know that it means Wilbur and Phil- who hadn't wanted to tell them George was alive at all in the first place- were probably against the idea.

But Tommy is saying that Dr. Soot and Director Watson are currently en-route to Beijing, where they're going to oversee the launch of the *Taiyang Shen*. Tommy is lucky enough to still be in charge of the SatCon unit taking photos of George, so he's around to say hello to his older-brother figure.

"That's not good, Techno," Tommy snorts. "It's bad. It's very bad. NASA's launched an investigation committee, and they're targeting you. They might *court-martial* you and Sapnap."

"Good," Techno repeats, raising one eyebrow. "Let them. I don't regret any of my choices."

"You could *die*, Techno."

"So could George."

The two have a stand-off for a moment, just a moment, before Tommy concedes.

"Alright, I suppose," he says. "Say hello to the green bitch for me."

"I will. Tell Wilbur he's a dick."

"I will."

"And tell Bad thank you. He'll know what for."

"If you say so, big man."

“Distance 61 meters, velocity 2.3 meters per second,” Niki reads off.

“No problem,” Sapnap replies, his eyes glued to his screens. One shows the camera feed from Docking Port A, the other a constant feed of the probe’s telemetry. Techno floats carefully behind Sapnap and Niki’s stations.

“Visual contact,” Puffy’s voice says over the radio. She’s in Airlock 3, fully suited up, outer door already open.

“Dream,” Techno says. “You in position?”

“Ready for action,” Dream replies, waiting in the still-pressurized Airlock 2- their emergency EVA if Puffy happens to need rescue.

“Alright, Sapnap,” Techno says. “Bring it in.”

“Aye-aye, Commander.”

“Distance 43 meters, velocity 2.3 meters per second,” Niki calls out.

“All stats nominal,” Sapnap reports.

“Slight rotation in the probe,” Niki says, glancing over.

“Anything under 0.3 is fine. What are we at?”

“0.05.”

“Perfect.”

“Probe is well within manual recovery range,” Puffy says.

“Copy,” Techno replies.

“Distance 22 meters, velocity same,” Niki says. “Angle is good.”

“Slowing her down a little,” Sapnap says, sending instructions to the probe.

“Velocity 1.8... 1.3... 0.9... stable at 0.9 meters per second.”

“Range?”

“Twelve meters.”

“Angle?”

“Angle’s good.”

“Then we’re in line for auto-capture,” Sapnap says.

Techno watches as the probe drifts gently to the docking port. The capture boom, a long metal triangle, enters the port’s funnel cleanly, and the automated system clamps onto the boom and pulls the probe in. It aligns and orients automatically, and after several loud clanks, the computer reports success.

“Docking complete,” Sapnap says.

“Seal is tight,” Niki reports.

“Puffy,” Techno says, trying and failing to suppress his grin. “Your services won’t be needed.”

“Roger that, Commander,” Puffy says. “Closing airlock.”

“Dream, return to interior,” Techno orders.

“Copy, Commander.”

“Airlock pressure to one hundred percent, I’m back in, I can see Dream,” Puffy reports.

Techno presses a button on his headset. “Jiuquan, probe docking complete. No complications.”

Bad’s voice comes over the comm. “Glad to hear it, *Hermes*. Report status of all supplies once you get them aboard and inspected.”

“Roger, Jiuquan,” Techno says, full-on beaming. His crew is safe. They have their supplies, and they’re going to get George. He takes the headset off and sets it to the side. “Unload the probe and stow the supplies. I’m going to help Puffy and Dream de-suit,” he orders Sapnap and Niki. They both nod, and the three float off in opposite directions.

“So,” Sapnap says slyly. Niki rolls her eyes, already knowing what’s coming. “Who would you have eaten first?” Niki glares at him. “Because I think I would be the tastiest.”

“You’re not funny.”

“Look at that,” Sapnap says, poking his bicep. “Pure solid muscle.”

“You disgust me.” She’s laughing.

They’re okay. They’re going to be okay.

“Sol 376. Three-hundred and seventy-six. Three hundred. And seventy six. And I am finally done with the rover modifications.

“This shit took me nearly two hundred sols. Nearly two hundred sols for some goddamn modifications! It’s fine, it’s whatever. Jesus Christ, I’m so fucking sick of Mars.”

“Sol 380. I finished my RTG experiments. Nyx IV was a success, yippee.

“Anyways. I’ve been thinking about laws on Mars. There’s an international treaty saying no country can lay claim to anything that’s not on Earth. And by another treaty, if you’re not in any country’s territory, maritime law applies. So Mars is, technically speaking, international waters.

“Now, NASA is an American nonmilitary organization, and it owns the Hab. So when I’m in the Hab, American law applies. As soon as I step outside, I’m in international waters.

“Eventually, I’m going to Schiaparelli and commandeering the Ares IV lander. Nobody have me explicit permission to commandeer the ship, and they won’t be able to until I’m operating the comm system. So therefore, after I board the Ares IV MAV and before talking to NASA, I’ll have taken control of a craft in international waters without permission.

“Which means I’m a fucking space pirate.”

“Sol 385. The worst part of the *Pathfinder* trip was being trapped in the rover. I’m planning on leaving for Schiaparelli a hundred sols before my rescue- or my death- and I will literally rip my own face off if I have to live in the rover for that long. So I’m going to make a fucking tent.

“Unfortunately, making my tent is going to be difficult, mostly because I used a lot of the spare canvas when the Hab blew up. Fuck you, Mars! Fuck you, Airlock One! But it’s fine. It’s fine. I’ll figure something out.”

“Sol 390. I’m done preparing for the rover. I don’t feel like I’m done, but it’s ready to go, staring at me every time I step outside the Hab. It’s kind of scary- once I leave for Schiaparelli, I’ll never see

the Hab again.

“Good-fucking-riddance.”

Bad takes his seat in the conference room. Everyone normal is present: Phil’s at the head of the table, Fundy is pacing around near the window, Quackity has his feet propped up on the table, and Wilbur is busy with his head buried in his laptop. There are also three other people there- Tommy, and sitting next to him, two men that Bad has never seen before.

“What’s up, Wilbur?” he asks, ignoring the three people that probably shouldn’t be there. “Why the sudden meeting?”

“We’ve got some developments,” Wilbur says. “Tommy, bring them up to date.”

“Yeah,” Tommy says. “George is completely ready to go to Ares IV. Rover’s all set, looks like he used a lot of the modifications we sent him. He also made some sort of... room, I think? Probably a workstation or something.”

“Why would he do that?” Phil asks.

“There’s gonna be a lot to do with the MAV once he gets to Schiaparelli,” Wilbur says “It’ll be easier without an EVA suit. He’s probably going to do it in that little room.”

“Clever,” Quackity snorts.

“He’s a clever guy,” Bad says defensively. “How about life support?” He turns to Tommy, who’s digging through his notes. The kid next to him, the tallest kid Bad has ever seen (and he hangs around Wilbur), is sitting rimrod straight. On the tall kid’s other side is a brunet who’s got his legs slung over the tall kid’s lap and his feet in Tommy’s notes. Tommy ignores him.

“He moved the AREC,” Tommy says, looking up at Bad.

“Sorry, the what?” Fundy asks.

“The external component of the atmospheric regulator,” Tommy says quickly. “He mounted it on the rover.”

“Great,” Bad says, clapping his hands. “It’s all coming together.”

“Don’t celebrate yet, Bad,” Wilbur says sternly, gesturing to the tall kid. “This is Ranboo, one of our Martian meteorologists and part of the astronaut training program. Ranboo, tell them what you told me.”

“Of course, Dr. Soot,” Ranboo says quickly. He shoves the other kid’s legs off his lap and steals Tommy’s laptop, setting it up on the table to show them. “Over the past few weeks, a dust storm has been developing in Arabia Terra, here. Not a big deal in terms of magnitude. It won’t hinder Davidson’s driving at all.”

“So what’s the issue?” Fundy asks. Bad purses his lips.

“It’s a low-velocity dust storm,” Ranboo explains. “Slow winds, but fast enough to pick up very small particles on the surface and whip them into thick clouds. There are five or six every year on Mars, but- they last for months, they cover huge sections of the planet, and they make the atmosphere thick with dust.”

“I still don’t see the problem,” Fundy says.

“Light,” the other kid says. “The total sunlight reaching the surface is very low in the area of the storm.”

“Sorry, who are you?” Bad says quickly.

“Tubbo Underscore,” the kid replies. Bad turns to Wilbur.

“*This* is Tubbo Underscore?” he asks. Wilbur shrugs. Bad turns back. “Why are you even here?”

“Tommy’s my ride,” Tubbo replies, one eyebrow raised, as if Bad is challenging him. Fucking kids. These three are what NASA’s going to be in the hands of when Bad retires?

“Anyways,” Ranboo says, clearing his throat. “Right now, the light is twenty-percent of normal, and Davidson’s rover is powered by solar panels.”

“Shit,” Quackity mutters. “And we can’t warn him.”

“So he gets less power,” Fundy presses. “Can’t he just recharge longer?”

“The current plan has him recharging all day long,” Wilbur explains. “With twenty percent of normal daylight, it’ll take five times as long to get the same energy. It’ll turn his forty-five sol trip into two hundred and twenty-five sols. He’ll miss the *Hermes* flyby.”

There’s silence in the room.

“We’ll just have to hope he finds a way through,” Phil says. “We can track his progress, and-”

“No, we can’t,” Tubbo interrupts.

“We can’t?” Phil asks. Tubbo shakes his head.

“The satellites won’t be able to see through the dust,” Tommy confirms. “Once he enters the affected area, we won’t see anything until he comes out on the other side.”

“Well,” Phil says. A pause. “Shit.”

“Sol 444. I just spent five sols driving in circles. I should be a product tester for Mars rovers when this whole thing is over.

“Seriously, though. I wonder what I’ll do when this is over and done with. Who knows. Maybe I’ll just be a botanist for NASA. I could teach survival courses, or something, train new astronauts. I’m pretty famous, as of the last time I spoke to Wilbur, so I’m sure I could get some marketing deals and make a ton of money.

“Or maybe I’ll bully the rest of the crew into settling down with me. Buy a house next to Sapnap and Karl, convince Niki and Puffy to move in across the street. I could get Dream to be my roommate, he can’t say no to me. Techno would probably refuse to live anywhere near us, but then he’d get a house down the street anyways. That sounds nice.

“So now I guess I just have to hope everything’s going to be okay. And that maybe, one day, I’ll be able to see that. All of us living by each other. Being friends. Not worrying about the cold vacuum of space. It’d be nice.”

“Sol 449. Today’s the big day. I’m leaving for Schiaparelli. The rover and the trailer are all packed, the potatoes are cooked, and there’s even water aboard. I’ve spent the past few days running diagnostics on everything- it’s all good to go. No problems that I can see.

“I’m about to do the final shutdown on the Hab. It’s going to be rough, saying goodbye- four hundred and fifty sols in this cold metal walls.

“Fuck yeah! I’m getting out of here! You know what- I don’t even care. I don’t care about the sentimentality, or whatever. That’s for losers who don’t have an entire planet trying to kill them. Schiaparelli or bust!”

“Sol 458! Ten sols of traveling! It’s actually not that much, but it’s a good psychological milestone.

“Ten sols down. Too fucking many to go.”

“Sol 466. I’m in Arabia Terra now, and it’s already looking like a dust storm is on its way. So.

“Fuck.”

“Did you read today’s updates?” Techno asks, pulling his meal out of the microwave.

“Yeah,” Sapnap replies. Techno takes a seat across from him. He glances back at Dream, staring forlornly out the window, and lowers his voice. “George entered the dust storm yesterday.”

“We need to face the possibility that he won’t make it to Schiaparelli,” Techno says, also lowering his voice. “If that happens, we need to keep crew morale up. We still have a long journey back to Earth.”

“That’s not going to happen,” Sapnap snorts.

“It’s pretty bleak, Sap. He’s already fifty kilometers into the storm, and he’ll go another ninety kilometers per sol. He’ll get in too deep to recover soon.”

“He’ll pull through,” Sapnap says, shaking his head. “Have a little faith, Commander.”

“Sapnap, you know I’m an atheist.”

“I know. I’m not talking about faith in God. I’m talking about faith in George Davidson.”

Techno sighs. “I hope you’re right.”

“Wanna bet a hundred bucks?” Sapnap grins at Techno. The Commander shakes his head, trying not to laugh.

“Of course not.”

“Damn right.”

“I’d never bet on a crewmate dying,” Techno says with a frown. “But that doesn’t mean-”

“Do yourself a favor and shut up, Techno,” Dream says, turning back from the window, clearly having been eavesdropping on the entire conversation. “You know he’ll make it.”

Techno smiles.

“Sol 476. I’m going to be okay. I can work this out.

“I’m on the very edge of a storm. I’m going to figure out a plan to get around it. And I’m going to be fine. I don’t have any other choice.”

“Sol 480. I think I’m getting ahead of the storm.

“I listen to Pigstep on repeat today, just for old times’ sake. It made me feel better, actually. It made me want to get off this damn planet even more. Better music, here I come.”

“Sol 497. I have survived the dust storm. I’ll be at the entrance to Schiaparelli tomorrow. I’ve almost made it. I’ve almost fucking made it.”

There is someone on Mars, and Mars doesn’t like trespassers.

The rover descends the slope into the Schiaparelli Basin, and it drives off an invisible ridge. The dense, hard soil gives way to soft powder. There are no visible hints of the sudden change thanks to the recent dust storm.

The rover’s front wheel sinks. The sudden tilt brings the right rear wheel completely off the ground. This puts more weight on the left rear wheel, which slips into the powder as well.

Before the trespasser can react, the rover rolls onto its side. The solar cells neatly stacked on the roof fly off and scatter. The trailer is dragged along, flipping onto his roof, and the rover tumbles down the hill. After nearly twenty meters, the rover finally shudders to a halt, coming to rest on its side.

The pressure seal is not breached.

The trespasser lives, for now.

Chapter End Notes

comment and i dunno. i'll appreciate it more than all the stars. maybe give you a virtual platonic forehead kissie.

[twitter](#)

Hemera

Chapter Notes

i thought this chapter was barely gonna hit 3000 words and it's nearly 6000 and i just wrote it in one sitting. my wrist hurts. i did not proofread this. please enjoy

also, the return of clay bloque my beloved

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The trespasser groans as he rolls over. First and foremost, he's alive, and that's what matters. George attempts to take in his surroundings- several different alarms are blaring at him, but none of them are life-threatening. He's on the ground of the rover- no, scratch that, he's on the door of the rover, which has tilted completely on its side. Excellent. Fucking excellent.

He assesses himself- only a few cuts and bruises. Good. Fine. He pulls himself up to a seated position and looks around- there's nothing that he sees that's going to kill him, which is, in all honesty, a lot better than he was expecting. Now he just has to figure out how to fix the hundreds of other issues that have now been presented before him.

If George believed in a god, he'd probably be cursing them out right about now. As is, he has to bite his tongue to keep from cursing out the stars.

"Jesus," Bad says, staring at the satellite images projected on the screen. "What the hell happened?"

"The rover's on its side," Tommy says, clearing his throat. "The trailer's upside down. And those rectangles all scattered around are solar cells."

The usual group is gathered, looking at the images. Fundy's lips are pursed. Wilbur slowly lifts his head from his hands.

"Do we have any information on the state of the rover?" he asks, and Tommy shrugs.

“Nothing obvious.”

“Any signs of George doing something after the accident? An EVA, maybe?” Bad tries.

“No EVA,” Tommy says quickly, shaking his head. “The weather’s clear. If he’d come out there’d be visible footsteps.”

“And is this the entire crash site?” Quackity asks, studying the images curiously.

“I think so,” Tommy replies. “Ordinary wheel tracks at the top of the photo things went wrong somewhere around the middle. Judging by that ditch, the rover probably rolled and slid down from there. You can see the trench it left behind. The trailer flipped forward onto its roof.”

“Well,” Quackity says slowly. “I’m not saying everything’s okay. But I don’t think it’s as bad as it looks.”

“Go on,” Phil says slowly.

“The rover’s designed to handle a roll,” Quackity points out. “And if there’d been pressure loss, there’d be a starburst pattern in the sand. I don’t see anything like that.”

“But George could be hurt inside,” Bad says. “He could have broken something or hit his head or-”

He cuts himself off. George is not going to die now. They’re not going to let him.

“Sure,” Quackity says, pointedly ignoring the awkward pause. “I’m just saying the rover is probably okay.”

There’s silence for another few moments. Tommy checks his watch, tapping his foot against the floor quickly.

“When was this taken?” Wilbur asks with a sigh.

“Seventeen minutes ago,” Tommy answers immediately. “We’ll get another in nine minutes.”

“Thanks, Tommy,” Wilbur says. “We’ve got work to do. Keep us posted on any changes.”

“Will do,” Tommy agrees.

Nine minutes later finds him dialing Wilbur’s number, reading out the morse code George has left in rocks. “Rolled. Fixing now.”

“What?” Wilbur barks. Tommy winces and pulls the phone away from his ear slightly. “That’s it?”

“That’s all he said,” Tommy confirms. He’s got his laptop pulled up and is quickly typing out an email to Fundy, Bad, and Quackity, so they can refer it to any other interested parties.

“Just three words? Nothing about his physical health? His equipment? His supplies?”

Tommy sighs. Wilbur should really know better by now.

“You got me,” he says. “He left a detailed status report, in rocks, scattered all over the ground. I just decided to lie to you for no reason.”

“Funny,” Wilbur says dryly. “Be a smart-ass to a guy seven levels above you at your company. See how that works out.”

“Oh no,” Tommy replies sarcastically. “I might lose my job as an interplanetary voyeur? I guess I’ll have to use my master’s degree for something else.” He can hear Wilbur laughing through the phone and he finishes his email, then presses send.

“I remember when you looked up to me,” Wilbur says. “You’d never talk back.”

“I’m glorified space paparazzi now,” Tommy quips. “The attitude comes with the job.”

“Sure, sure,” Wilbur snorts. “Just send the email.”

“Already done, big man.”

“Sol 498. Things didn’t go too well on my descent into the Schiaparelli Basin. To give you some indication of how unwell they went, I’m currently sitting cross-legged on the door of the rover. Because the door of the rover is on the ground. Because the rover is on its side.

“I got bounced around a lot, a couple of cuts, but I’m a well-honed machine in times of crisis. As soon as the rover toppled, I curled into a little ball and let gravity throw me around. That’s how cool and action-hero-y I am. Dream would be proud, I think.

“Most of the interior is completely intact, which is great. My makeshift bedroom came unfolded a bit, but it’s just canvas, so that’s easy enough to throw into a little ball in the corner and make a problem for later.

“Plus, my navigation computer is okay. It’s telling me the rover is at an ‘unacceptably dangerous tilt.’ Yes, Nav. Thank you. Thank you *so* much.

“Most of my critical life support stuff is okay, too. The rover did its job. I’m going to have to suit up and go look for the trailer soon, because that’s kind of a big problem. I only have around twenty sols’ worth of oxygen left for EVAs, so I do have a bit of time to get things done. The only other thing I need is for the rover to work for another 220 kilometers and for the life support to work for fifty-one more sols. That’s it. That’s all I need.

“And, you know, I need the crew to pick me up successfully. Which I guess is like asking for a miracle, so. I need a miracle too.”

“Sol 498, part two! Just got back from my EVA, and things aren’t too bad! Mind you, they’re not good, but they could be worse. I spelled out a little message for NASA, so they stop pissing themselves. I assume that’s what they’re doing. I assume that’s what they always do when I find myself in trouble. One of these days I’m going to get yelled at, and God, I can’t wait for that day to come.

“Anyways. I made myself a little to-do list and I’m going to get started on that tomorrow, when it’s a day that I didn’t spend getting tossed around like a piece of popcorn. Wish me luck.”

“Sol 499. A very productive day. I slept on the wall of the rover, which was fucking miserable, honestly, but I’ve done worse.

“I was going to try and fix the trailer today, but that thing is completely upside down. I’m going to need the rover for it. So I spent the day getting the rover back right side up. And I did! I fucking did, and not a single damn thing was wrong with it. The people at the Jet Propulsion Lab really know what they’re doing when it comes to making rovers. If I get back to Earth, I’m buying Quackity a beer. Hell, I’m buying the entire JPL a beer. Beers for everyone if I get back to Earth!

“Anyways. I’m out of daylight now, because I’m trapped in a fucking crater on Mars, so I’m going to have to deal with the trailer problem tomorrow. It’s probably stable enough for now, and that’s all that matters.”

“Sol 500. First of all, holy fuck. 500 feels like a huge accomplishment. I’ve made it very, very far—several hundred kilometers, far, and also the hundred and seventy some million miles between Earth and Mars. Have I been in space the longest out of any person? Other than the crew, of course. I think we might have done it. If we haven’t yet, we certainly will by the time this is over.

“My plan for tipping the trailer over succeeded, but I ran out of sunlight again. Fucking crater. I’ll just spend the rest of the evening enjoying a potato. And by ‘enjoying’ I mean ‘hating so much I want to kill people.’ I am never going to eat another potato after this. Sorry, Techno.”

“Sol 501. I started the day with some nothin’ tea. I’m British, you know, so of course I drink tea. I came up with the idea for nothin’ tea a few weeks ago and forgot to mention it, but it’s very easy to make. First, get some hot water, then add nothin’. Perfection.

“I spent the rest of the day fixing the trailer and then fixing any other problems that arose, so all in all, I spent about four sols on my little fender-bender accident. But we’re all in working order, so the plow continues on. 220 kilometers to go.

“And once I’m out of this damn crater, I can start beelining it toward the MAV. Which means

communication, which means I won't be so alone. I haven't talked to anyone other than this damn camera in months. If you couldn't tell, I think I might be starting to go a little crazy.

"I'm going to go eat my meal pack labeled 'Survived Something That Should Have Killed Me.' And in a few days, I'm going to eat the one called 'Arrival.' I'm almost there. It's so close I can practically feel it."

"It looks like he's fixed everything," Tommy confirms. "And his message today was 'All better now,' so I'm assuming he's got everything working."

"Awesome," Bad says, letting out a sigh of relief.

"Great news," Quackity agrees through the laptop they're Skyping him in on. Wilbur turns the computer so it's facing him, and Quackity makes a face of disgust. Wilbur ignores this.

"How are the plans for the MAV modification coming along, Alex? Is JPL going to have that procedure ready soon?"

"First off, never call me Alex again," Quackity says. "And we're working around the clock on it. We're past most of the big hurdles. Working out the details now."

"Good," Wilbur says with a nod. "Any surprises I should know about?"

"Uh," Quackity says, trailing off with an uncomfortable laugh. "Yeah, a few. I'll be back with the procedure in a day or two. We can go through it then."

"Ominous," Wilbur replies, rolling his eyes. "But okay, we'll talk about it later."

"Can I spread the word?" Fundy asks. "It'll be nice to see something other than the rover crash site on the news tonight."

“Absolutely,” Wilbur says with a nod. “Tommy, how long until he gets to the MAV?”

“He should be there by sol 504,” Tommy reports. “505 if he takes his time. So, somewhere between 11:41 AM Wednesday in Houston and 12:21 PM on Thursday.”

“Bad, who’s handling the Ares IV MAV communications?” Wilbur asks, turning to the flight coordinator.

“The Ares III Mission Control team,” Bad answers. “It’ll be in Control Room 2, if you want to be there.”

“I will be. Will you?”

“You bet your ass I will.”

They stare each other down for a moment. Tommy told them both about how Techno thanked Bad, specifically, saying that he would know what for. Wilbur wasn’t too pleased.

“Good,” Wilbur says finally, with a firm nod, and Bad smiles.

“Sol 504. Holy shit. Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit. I’m fifty kilometers from the MAV. I should be there sometime tomorrow. Holy shit. And here’s the best part- I got a signal from the MAV! NASA has the Ares IV MAV pretending to be the Ares III Hab, so the rover’s connected to it. Fucking brilliant thinking, honestly, and now I know exactly where it is. I made sure to leave them a little message in thanks in my Morse code rocks. ‘Got beacon signal.’ If I had more rocks, I would have added, ‘Fucking great idea,’ but it’s a sandy area.”

“Sol 505. I made it! I’m at the MAV!

“Well, right now I’m in the rover. But the rover is parked near the MAV!

“I went into the ship to do a systems check and boot-up, but I had to keep my EVA suit on the entire time because there’s no life support in there yet. It’s going through a self-check right now, and I’m feeding it oxygen and nitrogen with hoses from the rover. This is all part of the MAV’s design, of course, it doesn’t bring air along. Why would it? That’s needless weight when you’ll have a Hab full of air right next door.

“I’m guessing that the people at NASA are popping champagne right now and sending me lots of messages. I’ll read them in a bit. First I’m gonna work on that life support so I can work inside it comfortably. And then I’ll have a boring conversation with NASA.

“Well, the content may be interesting, but the fourteen-minute transmission time between here and Earth will be a bit dull. I’m sure if Wilbur’s the one talking to me, he’ll be a bit dull as well.”

[13:07] HOUSTON: Congratulations from all of us here at Mission Control! Well done! What’s your status?

[13:21] MAV: Thanks! No health or physical problems. The rover and trailer are pretty worn out, but still functional. Plenty of potatoes left, machines all working fine, I’m good to last until Sol 549.

[13:36] HOUSTON: Glad to hear it. Hermes is still on track for a Sol 549 flyby. As you know, the MAV will need to lose some weight to make the intercept. We’re going to get you those procedures within the day. How much water do you have? What did you do with urine?

[13:50] MAV: 550 liters of water remaining. Been dumping urine. Please don’t say it, Wilbur.

[14:05] HOUSTON: This is Bad, not Wilbur. Preserve all water. Don’t do any more urine dumps. Store it somewhere. Turn the rover’s radio on and leave it on. We can contact it through the MAV.

[14:21] MAV: I’m not drinking my fucking urine.

[14:37] HOUSTON: Not water. Fuel.

[14:52] MAV: Brilliant. That was sarcasm. Where the hell am I supposed to keep urine?

Quackity trudges into Wilbur's office and unceremoniously plops down in a chair. He drops his briefcase and lets his arms hang limp over the armrests, then spins himself around slowly.

"Have a good flight?" Wilbur asks, amused, one eyebrow raised.

"I don't know what sleep is," Quackity says. He holds his arms up dramatically, like he's about to deliver a monologue. "Sleep, my beloved! I see the light!"

"Yeah, yeah," Wilbur snorts. "Is it ready?"

"Yes, it's ready. But you're not going to like it."

"Go on."

Quackity kicks his briefcase to the side and pulls a booklet out of his coat. "Bear in mind, this is the end result of thousands of hours of work, testing, and lateral thinking by all the brightest minds at JPL, led by myself and your beloved Jack Manifold."

"Rip the bandaid off, Quackity."

Quackity slides the booklet over the desk. Wilbur thumbs through it, then slides it back.

"Put the bandaid back on, Quackity."

"Soot. Just look at it."

Wilbur looks through the booklet again, sighing as he does. When he's finished, he sets it down carefully on his desk.

“Walk me through it. What are we ditching?”

“Obviously, no five hundred kilograms of Martian soil and rock samples. One passenger instead of six, so we ditch their weight, their suits, and five chairs. We can remove all nonessential gear.

“Then we ditch the life support. We don’t need any of it. We’ll have George wear his EVA suit for the whole trip.”

“Won’t that make it awkward for him to use the controls?” Wilbur questions.

“He won’t be using them,” Quackity shrugs. “Major Sapnap will pilot the MAV remotely from *Hermes*. It’s already designed for remote piloting- it was remotely landed, after all.”

“And if something goes wrong?”

“It won’t go wrong. Sapnap is one of the best trained pilots NASA has. If there’s an emergency, he’s the one you want controlling the ship. And since George won’t be controlling the ship, we won’t need the controls.”

“Jesus,” Wilbur snorts. “We’re really gutting this thing.”

“I’m just getting started. Power needs to be dramatically reduced without life support, so we’re ditching three of the five batteries and the auxiliary power system, and the orbital maneuvering system’s three thrusters, and the secondary and tertiary comm systems.”

“Wait-” Wilbur starts, eyes wide. “You’re going to have a remote-controlled ascent with no backup comm systems?”

“No point,” Quackity shrugs. “If the comm system goes out during ascent, the time it takes for the backups to kick in will be too long to do any good. They’re no use.”

“This is getting really risky, Quackity.”

“I’m not even to the nasty stuff yet.”

“By all means,” Wilbur says dryly. “Tell me the nasty stuff.”

“Keep in mind, you asked me to. We’re removing the nose airlock, the windows, and Hull Panel Nineteen.”

Wilbur blinks once, then twice. “You’re taking the front of the ship off?” he asks slowly.

“Yeah,” Quackity nods.

“So he’s going to launch with a hole in the front of the ship?”

“Yeah,” Quackity says, still nodding. “We’ll have him cover it with the Hab canvas.”

“Hab canvas,” Wilbur says flatly. “For a launch into orbit.”

Quackity shrugs. “The hull’s mostly there to keep the air in. Mars’s atmosphere is so thin you don’t need a lot of streamlining. By the time the ship’s going fast enough for air resistance to matter, it’ll be high enough that there’s practically no air. We’ve run all the simulations. Should be good.”

“You’re sending him to space under a tarp.”

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“Like a hastily loaded pickup truck.”

“Yeah. Can I go on?”

“Sure, can’t wait.”

The two stare each other down for a long moment. Wilbur’s starting to wish he arranged this meeting for a bar rather than his office.

“We’re having him remove the back panel of the pressure vessel,” Quackity continues. “And the auxiliary fuel pump. And a Stage One engine.”

“An engine,” Wilbur repeats.

“Yup. The Stage One booster works fine if one engine goes out, and that’ll save us a huge amount of weight.”

Quackity falls silent.

“That it?” Wilbur asks.

“That’s it,” Quackity confirms.

“You’ve removed most of the safety backups, Quackity. What’d this do to the estimated odds of failure?”

“It’s about four percent.”

“Jesus Christ,” Wilbur says. “Normally we’d never even consider something that risky.”

“It’s all we’ve got, Wil,” Quackity says. “We’ve tested it all out and run simulations galore. We should be okay if everything works the way it’s supposed to.”

“Yeah,” Wilbur says. “Great. I’m not the one that’s telling George.”

[08:41] MAV: You've gotta be fucking kidding me.

[08:55] HOUSTON: Admittedly, they are very invasive modifications, but they have to be done. The procedure doc we sent has instructions for carrying out each of these steps with the tools you have on hand. Also, you'll need to start electrolyzing water to get the hydrogen for the fuel plant. We'll send you procedures for that shortly. -Quackity

[09:09] MAV: You're sending me into space in a convertible.

[09:24] HOUSTON: There will be Hab canvas covering the holes. It will provide enough aerodynamics in Mars's atmosphere. -Quackity

[09:25] HOUSTON: I didn't like it either, George. -Wilbur

[09:38] MAV: So it's a ragtop. Much better.

"You killed George," Techno says flatly, observing over Sapnap's shoulder.

"Yeah," Sapnap scowls, glaring at the monitor. The words 'Collision with Terrain' blink accusingly back at him.

"I pulled a nasty trick on him," Niki says, trying to console him. "I have him a malfunctioning altitude readout and made Engine Three cut out too early. It's a deadly combination."

"Shouldn't have been a mission failure," Sapnap retorts. "I should have noticed the readout was wrong, it was way off."

"Don't worry about it," Techno advises. "That's why we drill."

“Sure, Commander.”

“Resetting the sim,” Niki says. “Anything specific you want to try?”

“Surprise me,” Sapnap huffs. Techno leaves the control room and makes his way to the reactor. As he climbs to the center of the ship, the centripetal force diminishes to zero, leaving him floating. Puffy looks up from a computer console.

“Hey, Commander,” she says.

“How are the engines?” Techno asks, grabbing one of the handles so he stays attached to the slowly-turning room.

“All working within tolerance,” Puffy reports. “I’m doing a diagnostic on the reactor.”

“Great. How’s our course?”

“According to Dream, all’s well. No adjustments necessary. Still on track to our planned trajectory within four-ish meters.” Techno raises an eyebrow. “Dream was just up here talking to me. He wants to talk to you about something, I think.”

“Alright. Keep me posted on that diagnostic.”

“Sure thing, Tech.”

The Commander makes his way down to Airlock 2, where he knows Dream is working. Sure enough, the man has a coil of metal wire in one hand and a pair of work gloves in the other. He’s just standing up as Techno enters.

“Hey, Commander,” he greets.

“Puffy said you wanted to talk to me. But first- I want to know your plan for recovering George.”

He put Dream and Puffy on the job, with Puffy being the EVA specialist and Dream adamant about being the one to be doing the space walk.

“Easy enough if the intercept is good,” Dream says. “I just finished attaching all the tethers we have into one long line. It’s two hundred and fourteen meters long. I’ll have the pack on, so moving around will be easy, and I can get going up to around ten meters per second safely. Any more and I risk breaking the tether if I can’t stop in time.”

“Once you get to George, how fast of a relative velocity can you handle?”

“I can grab the MAV easily at five meters per second. Ten is like jumping onto a moving train, which I should point out I have done before. Anything more than that, though, and I might miss.”

“So basically, we need to get the ship within twenty meters per second of his velocity.”

“And the intercept has to be within two hundred and fourteen meters,” Dream adds. “Pretty narrow margin of error.”

“We’ve got a lot of leeway,” Techno shrugs. “Once the launch starts, we’ll have around forty minutes to correct our path if need be.”

“Good,” Dream says with a nod. “And two hundred and fourteen meters isn’t a hard limit, per se.” He looks at the Commander tentatively. Techno glares. Obviously, this is what Dream wanted to talk to him about.

“Yes, it is,” Techno says.

“Nah,” Dream says dismissively. “I know I’m not supposed to go untethered, but without my leash I could get way out there-”

“Not an option,” Techno says immediately.

“But we could double or even triple our safe intercept range-”

“We’re done talking about this,” Techno says sharply. Dream deflates.

“Sure. Sure.”

“Sol 526. There aren’t many people who can say they’ve vandalized a three-billion-dollar spacecraft, but I’m one of them.

“I’m not improvising anything, for once. I’m following NASA’s script to the T. Sometimes I miss the days when I made all the decisions by myself, and then I remember I’m infinitely better off with a bunch of geniuses deciding what I do than I am making shit up as I go along. Unless it’s the botanists. Fuck you, NASA’s team of botanists. I’m still the best botanist on this fucking planet.”

“Sol 529. I’m currently turning water into rocket fuel. I’m literally electrolyzing the urine Bad yelled at me to store. Which means if I make it back, I get to tell people I was pissing rocket fuel.”

[19:22] HOUSTON: We’re going to let you talk to the crew.

[19:37] MAV: You’re going to WHAT.

[19:51] HOUSTON: We’re patching you in to Puffy now. She should be able to handle it from there. You get ten minutes with each of them. Relay time should be around one minute, based on how close they are. I made the executive decision. Phil gave it the go-ahead. I think he’s sick of me. -Bad

[20:05] MAV: Holy shit, thank you, Bad. And Phil. And anyone else reading this. Give me my crew!

[20:12] PUFFY: Heya, George.

[20:13] MAV: Holy shit, Puffy! How the fuck have you been! What took them so long? They only talk to me about boring space stuff.

[20:14] PUFFY: Psych team was worried about “personality conflicts,” or something.

[20:15] MAV: What, cause you guys abandoned me on a godforsaken planet with no chance of survival?

[20:16] PUFFY: Very funny. Don’t make that kind of joke with Techno.

[20:17] MAV: Roger.

[20:18] PUFFY: How are you doing, George? Seriously.

[20:19] MAV: I’m okay. Excited to see you guys. Thanks for coming back to get me.

[20:20] PUFFY: Least we could do. How’d the MAV retrofit going?

[20:21] MAV: So far, so good. NASA said I had ten minutes with each of you, so- thank you, Puffy. Seriously. For everything. See you soon.

[20:22] PUFFY: See you soon, Georgie. Patching you over to Niki now.

[20:23] NIHACHU: GEORGE

[20:24] MAV: NIKI

[20:25] NIHACHU: I've missed you so much, oh my God. I'm so glad they're letting us talk to you! We were so worried when the rover tipped. Are you okay?

[20:26] MAV: I'm okay. No lasting physical injuries. How's the crew doing?

[20:27] NIHACHU: Worried sick about you. Physically, okay. I saw the procedures.

[20:28] MAV: Yeah, they're sort of shit.

[20:29] NIHACHU: If anyone can do this, you can.

[20:30] MAV: Sapnap's the one piloting my ship, though. Kind of worried about that one.

[20:31] NIHACHU: I've been running him through the simulations. He's only killed you a couple of times.

[20:32] MAV: Brilliant. That makes me feel so much better. Love you, Niki.

[20:33] NIHACHU: Love you too, George. Puffy's sending you to Sapnap now.

[20:34] SAPNAP: Hiya, Georgie.

[20:35] MAV: Oh my god, I miss your stupid face.

[20:35] MAV: Sorry. Don't tell anyone I said that.

[20:36] SAPNAP: Oh, we're only being broadcast all around the world, it's fine. How are you doing? You can be honest with me.

[20:37] MAV: Like shit. Worried sick. You?

[20:38] SAPNAP: Same. Your life is literally going to be in my hands.

[20:39] MAV: Oh yeah, I sort of forgot about that for a second. Niki says you've only killed me a few times in sims?

[20:40] SAPNAP: Only when she sends weird shit at me. Emergency situations that could never happen.

[20:41] MAV: They could happen.

[20:42] SAPNAP: They could. But we won't let them. We're too good at our jobs. You're the best botanist and engineer on Mars!

[20:43] MAV: You're damn right I am!

[20:44] SAPNAP: Puffy's patching you over to Dream now- love you, Georgie. Don't tell anyone I said that, and I won't tell anyone you missed me.

[20:45] BLOQUE: Hey

[20:47] MAV: I just wasted one of our precious minutes crying when I saw your last name. I've been calling you Dream for so long that I forgot how stupid it was. Also, I missed you.

[20:48] BLOQUE: Jackass. I was getting worried when I didn't get the message within a minute.

[20:49] MAV: Aw, poor Dreamy. Did I worry you?

[20:50] BLOQUE: You're insufferable. Stay on Mars.

[20:51] MAV: No. Heart.

[20:52] BLOQUE: God, I've missed you.

[20:53] MAV: Yeah, yeah, I missed you too, you sappy idiot. I'll see you soon, though.

[20:54] BLOQUE: You will. And you get the last word, since you wasted one of our minutes. Puffy's gonna patch you over to the Commander. Stay safe down there, George.

[20:55] MAV: Stay safe up there, Dream. Only a few sols to go.

[20:56] TECHNOBLADE: Hey, Davidson.

[20:57] MAV: Oh, please, stop with the formalities, Commander. How's it going up there?

[20:58] TECHNOBLADE: Pretty good, George. I'd give you a detailed science report but I'm sure that's not what you're asking. Everyone's anxious for you to be back. And if I'm calling you George, you've got to stop calling me Commander.

[20:59] MAV: I'm anxious to be back. And- never. You keep telling us to do it, but I'm willing to bet all of my remaining potatoes that the whole crew is still calling you Commander. We made a pact at the start of the mission. It's a whole thing.

[21:00] TECHNOBLADE: Why I put up with you people is beyond me. How's it going eating only potatoes?

[21:01] MAV: I'm living your dream, Commander. But I'm never eating another potato again.

[21:02] TECHNOBLADE: I'm sad to hear it.

[21:03] MAV: Also, hey- can we talk about Pigstep? What the fuck? I'm so fucking sick of Pigstep, Techno, you have no diea.

[21:04] TECHNOBLADE: Yeah, yeah, mock my shitty taste, George. Pigstep is a good song.

[21:05] MAV: You're horrible. I don't know why I respect you. But our time is almost up, so I suppose I'll talk to you the next time NASA decides to let us speak to each other.

[21:06] TECHNOBLADE: I'm sure Puffy could hack the system if she tried. See you soon, George, live and in person.

"Sol 543. I'm done. I'm actually done with all of the modifications, and I still have six sols to go. I'm going to do some of the tests, NASA's going to do some of the tests, but in six days, this baby's going to fly. Holy shit. Holy. Shit.

"If everything goes right- I'm going home."

"Final checks for this shift are complete," Bad says into his headset. "Timekeeper."

"Go, Flight."

"Time until MAV launch?"

"Sixteen hours, nine minutes, forty seconds... mark."

"Copy that. All stations: Flight director shift change." Bad takes off the headset and rubs at his eyes, then passes it over to Punz.

“All stations. Flight director is now Luke Punz.”

“Call me if anything happens,” Bad mutters. “If not, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Get some sleep, boss,” Punz advises. Bad snorts.

Wilbur watches from the observation booth, Fundy standing next to him. “Why ask the timekeeper? It’s on the huge mission clock in the center screen.”

“He’s nervous,” Fundy snorts. “That’s what Bad looks like nervous. He’s double-checking and triple-checking everything.”

“Fair enough,” Wilbur mutters.

“They’re camping out on the lawn, by the way,” Fundy says. “Reporters from all over the world. Our press rooms just don’t have enough space.”

“The media loves a drama,” Wilbur shrugs. “It’ll be over tomorrow, one way or another.”

“What’s our role in all this?” Fundy asks. “If something goes wrong, what can Mission Control do?”

“Nothing,” Wilbur says, shaking his head. “Not a damn thing.”

“Nothing?”

“It’s all happening twelve light-minutes away. That means it takes twenty-four minutes for them to get the answer to any question they ask. The whole launch is twelve minutes long. They’re on their own.”

“So we’re completely helpless?” Fundy looks desperate. They don’t give him enough credit,

Wilbur thinks, for all the shit he deals with. The media on top of all the same things as the rest of them.

“Yeah,” Wilbur says. “Sucks, doesn’t it?”

“Sol 549. Today’s the day. In about four hours, I’m going to ride a giant explosion into orbit. This is something I have done a few times before, but never with a jury-rigged mess like this.

“If I die in an explosion, that won’t be so bad. I’ll go instantly. If we miss the intercept, I’m just going to drop the oxygen tanks so I breathe pure nitrogen for a few minutes. It won’t be as bad as slowly suffocating. I’d just get tired, fall asleep, and die. So. I’ve got plans. I’m not going to die painfully, either way.

“I’m having a hard time accepting that this is it. Either I live, or I die. This frigid desert has been my home for a year and a half. And now it’s all over. I have no more jobs to do, no more nature to defeat. I’ve eaten my last Martian potato. I’ve slept in the rover for the last time. I’ve left my last footprints in the Martian sand. One way or another, I’m leaving Mars today, forever.

“Fucking finally.”

“Sol 549. I realized I ended the video recording, but there was more I wanted to say. Since eventually these will be recovered, and the people I love will probably still be around by the time NASA releases them to the world, I wanted to leave a message. To the people I love.

“Just, a general message to the world: maybe I’m going to die. I don’t think I’m afraid of it. I’ve looked death in the eyes every day on this horrible, desolate, beautiful planet, and I’ve survived it all. If the stars have decided that now is my time to go, then fuck, I guess this is it. But I’m hopeful that there’s a brighter day ahead.

“Hemera, goddess of the day. Dream would be proud of my Greek mythology knowledge. I hope I get to tell him about all of this. I hope I get to tell the whole crew, hell, the whole *world*, about all of this.

“But if I don’t- well. Mom and Dad, I love you guys. Thank you for raising me. Wilbur, Bad, Quackity, Phil, Fundy, Tommy, Tubbo, and everyone else at NASA- thank you guys so much for working so hard to get me home. Whatever happens now isn’t your fault.

“Puffy- thank you for being the mother figure this whole crew needed. Thank you for being the tough but kind figure *I* needed. And Niki- thank you for being the completely kind figure, and for not beating around the bush with me. You two are two of the most incredible women I’ve ever met.

“Commander- Techno. Techno. Don’t blame yourself, if something goes wrong. We all did the best we could. I’m proud of you for making the tough decisions that the rest of us couldn’t.

“Sapnap- thank you for being my best friend all this time. You and Karl are going to live long, happy lives, and if something goes wrong, I’ll be watching you from the stars.

“And Dream- God. Dream.”

There’s a long pause. George, sitting in his EVA suit inside the MAV, swallows harshly.

“Dream, I think you’re probably the love of my life, and I know you’re doing everything you can to get me home. So, I know we sort of let this unspoken thing be unspoken, but if I’m going to die, I might as well say it now. I love you. I love you more than all the stars in the sky.

“I think that’s it. I think that’s all I have to say. I’m going to be launched into space. I may not survive. But if I do survive, well- what a story that’ll be.”

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

if you're mad at me for the cliffhanger again leave a comment, they're always appreciated <3

Hestia

Chapter Notes

once again. wrote this in a day. did not proofread it. please forgive me and please read end notes

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There are five minutes to launch. The entirety of Earth is holding its breath. In space, six astronauts do not hold theirs. They cannot afford to. They have a mission to enact.

George has been calling it *Hestia* in his head. Goddess of the hearth, the home. Today he will go home or he will die. In *five minutes*, he will go home or he will die.

He is going to go home, he tells himself. He's going to go home. He's going to see his parents again, his cat. He's going to see Karl and Wilbur and everyone on Earth. He's going to see the *Hermes*. He's going to see his crew.

"Fuel pressure green," Niki's voice says across the galaxy, a billion televisions on Earth blaring her words, the comms placed firmly in the ears of the crew prepared to pick up every syllable, every breath. "Engine alignment perfect. Communications five by five. We are ready for preflight checklist, Commander."

"Copy," Technoblade says. He's floating behind her and Sapnap, both sitting at their controls anxiously. Dream and Puffy are in their EVA suits, prepared for recovery down in the airlock. They're ready. They've been preparing for this. It's time. "CAPCOM."

"Go," Niki responds.

"Guidance."

"Go," Niki says again.

"Remote Command."

“Go,” Sapnap says, his hands gripping the controls. His bandana is holding back his hair, and he’s white as a sheet. Niki reaches over and pats his shoulder, and he sends her an appreciative look. She offers him a grim smile in response.

“Pilot.”

“Go,” George says from the MAV. Technoblade lets out a sigh of relief. The galaxy cheers. The crew does not hold their breath.

They have work to do.

Bad paces back and forth behind his station at Mission Control. The controllers are monitoring everything, prepared to help in any way they can, but the communication distance between *Hermes* and Earth is large enough to the point that they are rendered powerless to anything but watch.

There’s a group of people behind him. Phil is among them, sitting at the front, hands crossed together in something that might be prayer, but probably isn’t. Wilbur is standing next to him, one hand gripping his shoulder, the other gripping Tommy’s hand. Tommy is chewing on his nails, Tubbo seated next to him, waiting, watching. Quackity is on Phil’s other side, arms crossed, watching everything with an expressionless face. Fundy is pacing near the door, prepared to leave to talk to the media if need be. *When* need be.

There’s a slew of other people there, too, including the crew’s family, George’s parents, and Skeppy. Bad sends him a glance, and Skeppy gives him a firm nod. Bad turns back to the screens, to his controls. Something familiar. Something useless.

“Telemetry,” Techno’s voice says over the speakers. Bad cracks his knuckles. This is it. Now or never.

“Go,” Niki says.

“Recovery.”

“Go.” Dream’s voice.

“Secondary Recovery.”

“Go.” Puffy.

“Mission Control, this is *Hermes* Actual,” Technoblade reports. “We are go for launch and will proceed on schedule. We are T minus four minutes, ten seconds to launch... mark.”

“We got that?” Bad calls.

"Affirmative!" comes the response from the timekeeper. Bad startles as he feels a hand on his shoulder, and turns to see Wilbur.

“There’s nothing we can do,” Wilbur says, and Bad takes a deep breath. He nods. There’s nothing they can do now but pray to the stars that the crew brings George home.

“About four minutes, George,” Techno’s voice says over the comms. “How’re you doing down there?”

“Eager to get up there, Commander,” George’s voice says, and in the airlock, Dream nearly lets out a sob. It’s just so damn good to hear George’s voice. Puffy has a hand on his shoulder- he can barely feel it through the EVA suit.

“We’re going to make that happen,” Techno says. “Remember, you’ll be pulling some pretty heavy g’s. It’s okay if you pass out. You’re in Sapnap’s hands.”

“Tell that asshole no barrel rolls.”

“Copy that, MAV.”

If the moment weren't so emotional, Dream would be laughing. He's missed George's snark. He's missed everything about George, really, and he thinks Puffy can tell. He clears his throat, staring through the window of the airlock down at the red planet below.

“Didn't think I'd be back here again,” he says, and Puffy laughs, but there's no humor behind it.

“We're the first,” she says contemplatively. She moves to stand next to Dream, so they can both look down on the planet that's caused them so much grief.

“First what?” Dream asks. He doesn't look over to her. She floats back, giving him his space, and he appreciates it.

“The first to visit Mars twice.”

Dream pauses, thinks about it, laughs. “You're right. Even George can't say that.”

“He can't.”

They both stare in silence for a moment, and then Dream turns back from the window. Puffy is already looking at him, waiting for him to speak.

“Puffy,” he says.

“Dream,” she replies. She knows where this is going, and he can tell that she knows. He knows that she'll say no, but he has to ask anyways.

“If I can't reach George, I want you to release my tether.”

“Dream,” Puffy says seriously. “Techno's already said no.”

“I know what Techno said, but if I need a few more meters, I want you to cut me loose. I have an MMU. I can get back without a tether.”

“I won’t do it, Dream.”

“It’s my own life at risk, and I say it’s okay.”

“You’re not the Commander, Dream.”

They stare each other down for a moment. Eventually, Dream concedes.

“Fine,” he scowls. “But if push comes to shove- please. Release the tether.”

Puffy doesn’t respond.

It doesn’t take long before Niki starts counting down, her voice loud and clear over the comms. “T-minus ten. Nine. Eight.”

“Main engines start,” Sarnap says, sounding more serious than he’s ever been.

“Seven. Six. Five. Mooring clamps released.”

“Five second, George,” Techno says. “Hang on.”

“See you in a few, Commander,” George radios back, and he sounds terrified.

“Four. Three. Two.”

Dream takes a deep breath in, then out.

“One.”

George lays on the acceleration couch, waiting for liftoff. The MAV rumbles in anticipation. He has stepped foot on Mars for that last time; he's leaving now. One way or another.

When the MAV launches, it does so with incredible force- more acceleration than any manned ship in the history of space travel. George is shoved back into the couch so hard he can't even cry out. He's lucky the EVA helmets are padded; the edges of his vision are becoming blurry with how hard his head is driven back. He can't move. He can't breathe.

The Hab canvas attached to the front of the ship is flapping. Concentration is difficult, but something tells him that flapping is bad.

“Velocity seven hundred...” someone's voice says in the distance. It sounds like it might be Niki.

A voice that may be Techno's says “...low. Too low.”

And then, someone that might be Sapnap- “It's fighting me. What the fuck is going...”

George goes in and out of focus for a moment. There's a rip on the canvas, rapidly widening, and he vaguely thinks that that's a bad sign. Through the opening, there's a red sky, stretching out infinitely.

The atmosphere grows thinner as the MAV continues it's ascent. The canvas stops fluttering. The sky turns from red to black.

“...eorge! George, do you copy? What's happ...?”

He distantly hears Techno's voice. He thinks, vaguely, that the sky in front of him is much more interesting than whatever it is the Commander wants from him. He loves space. He's always loved space. It'll be nice to die there, he thinks, and then consciousness slips out of his grasp.

“Velocity seven hundred and forty-one meters per second!” Niki calls out. “Altitude thirteen hundred and fifty meters.”

“Copy!” Sapnap says, hands flying.

“That’s low,” Techno comments. “Too low.”

“I know,” Sapnap agrees. “It’s fighting me. What the fuck is going on?”

“Velocity eight hundred and fifty; altitude eighteen hundred and forty-three.”

“I’m not getting the power I need!” Sapnap snaps.

“Engine power at a hundred percent,” Niki tells him.

“I’m telling you it’s fighting me,” he says, looking away for barely a second to glance at Techno.

“George,” Techno says calmly. “George, do you copy? What’s happening? Can you report?”

They get nothing. Techno can imagine Dream pacing back and forth in the airlock; he’s worried, too, but not immensely so. He was anticipating that George would pass out at some point during the launch.

“I’m getting more response now,” Sapnap says a moment later.

“Back on track with full acceleration,” Niki agrees. “Must have been drag. The MAV’s out of the atmosphere now.”

“It was like flying a cow,” Sapnap mutters, disgruntled. His hands are still racing over the controls,

and Techno can hear him taking deep breaths, trying to keep himself calm.

“Can you get him up?” Techno asks.

“He’ll get to orbit,” Niki answers. “But the intercept course may be compromised.”

“Get him up first,” Techno orders. “Then we’ll worry about intercept.”

“Copy. Main engine cutoff in fifteen seconds.”

“It’s not fighting me at all anymore,” Sapnap mutters.

“Well below target altitude. Velocity is good.”

“How far below?” Techno asks.

“Can’t say for sure,” Niki responds. “All I have is accelerometer data. We’ll need radar pings to work out the final orbit.”

“Back to automatic guidance,” Sapnap says.

“Main shutdown in four,” Niki adds. “Three. Two. One. Shutdown.”

“Confirm shutdown,” Sapnap mutters.

“Davidson, you there?” Techno asks. “Davidson? George, do you read?”

“He probably passed out, Commander,” Niki says. Which, yeah, Techno knows that. But it’s nice to hear it from the team’s actual medical doctor. “He pulled twelve g’s. Give him a few minutes.”

“Copy. Got the orbit yet?”

“Working out intercept range and velocity... got it.”

Sapnap and Techno both watch over Niki’s shoulder as she brings up the software. Normally that would be Puffy or Dream’s job, but they’re both otherwise occupied. Niki’s their backup for both navigation and systems operations.

“Intercept velocity will be eleven meters per second,” she reports.

“I can make that work,” Dream replies over the radio.

“Distance at intercept will be- oh my God.”

“What?” Techno asks.

“We’ll be sixty-eight kilometers apart.”

“Did she say sixty-eight *kilometers* ?” Puffy demands. “ *Kilometers* ?”

“God damn it,” Sapnap mutters.

“Keep it together,” Techno orders, mind already racing. “Work the problem. Sapnap, is there any juice in the MAV?”

“Negative, Commander,” Sapnap says. “They ditched the OMS system to lighten the launch weight. Figured we wouldn’t need it.”

“Then we’ll have to go to him,” Techno says, determined. “Niki, time to intercept?”

“Thirty-nine minutes, twelve seconds,” Niki says, her voice quavering.

“Dream,” Techno says, still keeping his voice calm. If he loses it, the crew will lose it. He’s got to keep himself together. “How far can we deflect in thirty-nine minutes with the ion engines?”

“Five kilometers, tops,” Dream says.

“Not enough,” Techno says begrudgingly. “Sapnap, what if we point the thrusters in the same direction?”

“Depends on how much fuel we want to save for adjustments on the trip home.”

“How much do you need?”

“I could do it with maybe twenty percent of what’s left.”

“Alright, so if we use the other eighty percent-”

“Checking,” Sapnap says, fingers flying over the console. “We’d get a delta-v of thirty-one meters per second.”

“Puffy, math,” Techno orders.

“We’d deflect seventy-two kilometers!” Puffy says excitedly. “If we use seventy-five point five percent of remaining adjust fuel, it’ll bring the intercept range to zero.”

“Do it,” Techno orders.

“Yes, Commander,” Sapnap says with a grin.

“Hold on,” Niki says. “That’ll get our range to zero, but the intercept velocity will be forty-two meters per second.”

“Then we have thirty-nine minutes to figure out how to slow down,” Techno says. “Sapnap, burn the jets.”

“Burning,” Sapnap says.

“Okay,” Fundy says, pacing back and forth. “A lot of shit just happened really fast. Wilbur. Explain.”

Wilbur watches Bad throw his hands up in frustration and tries to hold back a laugh. The situation is dire, and Fundy is looking at him, waiting for an explanation.

“The launch missed,” Wilbur says with a sigh. “Badly. The intercept distance was going to be way too big. So they’re using the attitude adjusters to close the gap.”

“And what do the attitude adjusters usually do?”

“Rotate the ship. They’re not made for thrusting it. *Hermes* doesn’t have quick-reaction engines, just the slower ion engines.”

“So... problem solved?” Fundy asks hopefully.

“Nope,” Wilbur says with a sigh. “They’ll get to him, but they’ll be going forty-two meters per second when they get there.”

“Jesus,” Fundy mutters. “That’s... that’s ninety miles an hour. There’s no hope of Dream grabbing George at that speed.”

“Right,” Wilbur mutters. “And they can’t use the attitude adjusters to slow down in time, they won’t have enough fuel left to make it home.”

“So what can they do?” Fundy asks, hoping Wilbur has an answer.

“I don’t know,” Wilbur says after a moment. “And even if I did, I couldn’t tell them in time.”

“Well, fuck,” Fundy says.

“Yeah,” Wilbur agrees.

“Davidson,” Techno tries again. “Do you read? George?”

“Commander,” Dream says. He’s pacing back and forth in the airlock, Puffy standing behind him; she knows better than to try and get him to calm down right now. “He’s wearing a surface EVA suit, right?”

“Yeah.”

“It should have-”

“A bio-monitor,” Niki interrupts with a gasp.

“Right,” Dream agrees. “It’ll be broadcasting.”

“It’s not a strong signal,” Puffy points out. “It’s only designed to go a couple hundred meters.”

“But we might be able to pick it up,” Sapnap counters.

“Niki,” Techno says firmly.

“On it,” Niki says. “I’ve gotta look up the frequencies, give me a second.”

“Sapnap,” Techno continues. “Any ideas on how to slow down?”

Dream can imagine Sapnap shaking his head. He can imagine the look on his best friend’s face. It’d be the same as the feeling in his gut; hopelessness.

No. He can’t think like that. They’re going to get George back.

“I got nothing, Commander,” Sapnap says. “We’re just going too damn fast.”

“Dream? Puffy?”

“The ion drive isn’t strong enough,” Dream says. He wants to curse, to scream, but he knows that won’t get them anywhere.

“Got his bio-monitor data,” Niki reports. “Pulse fifty-eight, blood pressure ninety-eight over sixty-one. Lower than I’d like, but he’s been in Mars gravity for eighteen months. It’s expected. He’s okay. He’s alive.”

Dream lets out a breath of relief. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Puffy deflate.

“Time to intercept?” Techno asks.

“Thirty-two minutes,” Niki answers.

George reluctantly returns to consciousness with a pitiful groan. He opens his eyes and winces; his chest is fucking killing him.

There’s hardly any canvas left. Tatters float along the edges of the hole it once covered, which

grants George an unobstructed view of Mars from orbit. The surface stretches out seemingly forever; only eighteen people in history have seen this view in person.

“Fuck you,” George says to the beautiful, ugly, horrible, wonderful planet below.

He takes a deep breath in, then out. His ribs scream in pain. He’d be screaming in pain, if his radio wasn’t on and his whole crew wouldn’t hear him. “MAV to *Hermes* .”

“George!” someone that’s gotta be Techno says. George is only doubtful because of how *excited* Techno sounds.

“Affirmative,” George says, trying not to grin. “That you, Commander?”

“Affirmative. What’s your status?”

“Well, I’m on a ship with no control panel,” he says. “That’s as much as I can tell you.”

“How do you feel?” Niki’s voice asks, concerned.

“Feels like I broke a rib. How are you?”

“Working on getting to you,” Techno says. “There was a complication in the launch.”

“Yeah,” George laughs. His chest does not appreciate this. He looks out the hole in the ship. Complications. Funny. “The canvas didn’t hold. I think it ripped early in the ascent. Not too sure, I was kinda going in and out of consciousness.”

“Well, that’s consistent with what we saw during the launch,” Techno says.

“How bad is it, Commander?” George asks. He knows Techno won’t bullshit him.

“We were able to correct the intercept range with the attitude thrusters. But there’s a problem with the intercept velocity?”

“How big of a problem?”

“Forty-two meters per second.”

“Well,” George says. “Shit.”

“Well, at least he’s okay for the moment,” Sapnap mutters.

“I heard that.”

“Dream,” Techno says. “I’m coming around to your way of thinking. How fast can you get going if you’re untethered?”

“We already ran the numbers,” Dream says. “At best we could get twenty-five meters per second. Even if I could get to forty-two, I’d need another forty-two to match *Hermes* on the way back.”

“Copy.”

“Hey,” George says brightly. “I’ve got an idea.”

“Of course you do,” Techno mutters.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“What do you got?”

“I could find something sharp and poke a hole in the glove of my suit,” George says brightly. “I could use the escaping air as a thruster and fly my way to you.”

“How does he come up with this shit?” Puffy mutters.

“Can you get to forty-two meters per second that way?” Techno asks.

“No idea,” George responds.

“I can’t see you having any control if you did that. You’d be eyeballing the intercept and using a thrust vector you can barely control.”

“I will admit that it’s fatally dangerous,” George says. “But consider this: I’d get to fly around like Iron Man.”

“We’ll keep working on other ideas, George.”

“Iron Man, Commander. *Iron Man.* ”

“Stand by.”

“Sure, sure.”

“Maybe it’s not such a bad idea,” Techno muses.

“You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me,” Sapnap mutters. “It’s a terrible idea. He’d shoot off into space-”

“Not him,” Techno corrects. “Us. Sapnap, get Dream’s station up and running.”

“Okay,” Sapnap says, turning back to the computer. He types for a moment or two, then turns back

and says, “It’s up. What do you need?”

“Dream’s got software for calculating course offsets caused by hull breaches, right?”

“Yeah,” Dream says. “It estimates course corrections needed in the event of-”

“Right,” Techno interrupts. “Fire it up. I want to know what happens if we blow the VAL.”

Sapnap and Niki look at each other. Techno knows he sounds crazy, but he’s not, this just might work-

“Um. Yes, Commander,” Sapnap says.

“The vehicular airlock,” Niki says slowly. “You want to... open it?”

“Plenty of air in the ship,” Techno shrugs. “It’d give us a good kick.”

“Right,” Sapnap says doubtfully. “And it might blow the nose of the ship off in the process.”

“And all the air would leave,” Niki points out.

“We’ll seal the bridge and reactor room. We can let everywhere else go vacuo, but we don’t want explosive decompression here or near the reactor.”

“We’re going to have the same problem as George,” Puffy points out. “But on a larger scale. We can’t direct that thrust.”

“We don’t have to,” Techno says. “The VAL is in the nose. Escaping air would make a thrust vector through our center of mass. We just need to point the ship directly away from where we want to go.”

“Okay,” Niki says. “We’ve got the numbers. A breach at the VAL, with the bridge and reactor room sealed off, would accelerate us twenty-nine meters per second.”

“That’s a relative velocity of thirteen meters per second afterward,” Puffy adds.

“Dream,” Techno says. “Can you do thirteen meters per second?”

“It’ll be risky,” Dream says. “But it’s a hell of a lot better than forty-two.”

“Niki, time to intercept?”

“Eighteen minutes, Commander.”

“What kind of jolt will we feel with that breach?” Techno asks.

“The air will take four seconds to evacuate,” Sapnap responds. “We’ll feel a little less than one g.”

“George,” Techno says into the headset. “We have a plan.”

“Yay!” George responds. “A plan!”

“Houston, be advised,” Techno’s voice says, ringing out throughout the Mission Control room. “We are going to deliberately breach the VAL to produce thrust.”

“What?” Bad shrieks. “They’re going to *what* ?”

“Oh my God,” Wilbur mutters.

“Fuck me raw,” Fundy adds. “I better get to the press room. Any parting knowledge before I go?”

“They’re going to breach the ship,” Wilbur says, still dumbfounded. “They’re going to *deliberately* breach the ship. Oh my God.”

“Got it,” Fundy says with a grim nod. “Got it.”

“How will we open the airlock doors?” Sapnap asks. “There’s no way to open them remotely, and if anyone’s nearby when it blows-”

“Right,” Techno says. “We can open one door with the other shut, but how do we open the other?” He thinks about it for a moment, then says, “Dream. I need you to come back in and make a bomb.”

“Um,” Dream says loudly, nervously. “Again, please, Commander?”

“A bomb,” Techno confirms. “You’re a chemist. Can you make a bomb out of stuff on board?”

“I mean... yes,” Dream says cautiously. “We’ve got flammables and pure oxygen.”

“Sounds good,” Techno says.

“It’s. Techno. It’s dangerous to set off an explosive device on a spacecraft.”

“So make it small,” Techno says. “It just needs to poke a hole in the inner airlock door. Any hole will do. If it blows the door off, that’s fine. If it doesn’t, the air will get out slower, but for longer. The momentum change is the same, and we’ll get the acceleration we need.”

“Pressurizing Airlock 2,” Puffy reports. “How will we activate this bomb?”

“Niki?” Techno asks.

“Uh,” Niki says. “Dream, can you run wires into it?”

“Yeah,” Dream says. “I can use a threaded stopper, small hole for the wires. It won’t have much of an effect on the seal.”

“Then we can run the wire to Lighting Panel 41,” Puffy says. “It’s next to the airlock, and Niki can turn it on and off from where she is.”

“There’s our remote trigger,” Techno says. “Niki, go set up the lighting panel. Dream, get in here and make the bomb. Sapnap, go close and seal the doors to the reactor room.”

“Yes, Commander,” Niki says, kicking off her seat and floating toward the hallway.

“Commander,” Sapnap says, stopping at the exit. “You want me to bring back some space suits?”

“No point,” Techno shrugs. “If the seal on the bridge doesn’t hold, we’ll get sucked out at close to the speed of sound. We’ll be jelly with or without suits on.

Sapnap nods and floats off. Techno tries to push away the sinking feeling in his gut.

“Are you back in yet, Dream?” he asks.

“Entering now, Commander.”

“Puffy, I need you back in, too, but don’t take your suit off.”

“Okay,” Puffy says. “Why?”

“We’re going to have to literally blow up one of the doors,” Techno says. “I’d rather we kill the

inner one. I want the outer door unharmed.”

“Makes sense. What’s in it for me?”

“I need you to come back inside, depressurize the VAL, and lock the outer door. Then crawl along the hull to get back to Airlock 2. Use your tether. Mountain-climber style.”

“Copy, Commander,” Puffy says.

“Get to it. And Dream, hurry.” Techno takes a deep breath and turns his radio back on so he can talk to George. “How are you doing, Davidson?”

“Oh, wonderful,” George drawls sarcastically. “You mentioned a plan?”

“We’re going to vent the atmosphere to get thrust.”

“How?”

“We’re going to blow a hole in the VAL.”

“What?” George shrieks, and Techno winces. “How?”

“Dream’s making a bomb.”

“Oh my God.”

Techno laughs at the tone of George’s voice. It’s a mix of complete incredulity and utter awe. God, he knows he’s not supposed to be encouraging inter-crew relationships, but he needs George back just so he and Dream will stop pining after each other.

“I think we should just go with my Iron Man idea,” George adds.

“Too risky and you know it,” Techno says sternly.

“The thing is, I’m selfish,” George says. “I want the memorials to be just for me. I don’t want the rest of you losers in them. I can’t let you guys blow the VAL.”

“Oh,” Techno says. “Well, in that case- wait a minute- I’m looking at my shoulder patch and it turns out I’m the commander. Sit tight. We’re coming to get you.”

“Fucker.”

Dream knows how to make a bomb. He’s got a doctorate in chemistry, for God’s sake- most of his training involved learning how to *not* make a bomb. He knows how to make a damn bomb.

The ship has very few flammables, as a rule- don’t let unnecessary flammable things into space. But food has flammable hydrogens, which means Dream can gather up a bunch of sugar and, with enough of it, detonate a bomb worth eight sticks of dynamite. So it goes.

Dream is careful with creating the bomb, muttering to himself under his breath. He does not allow his hands to shake. He does not allow his heart to stutter. This is his job. This is what he was trained for.

Or, rather, trained not to do.

Niki works quickly on the lighting panel as Puffy floats toward the VAL. She grabs Puffy’s arm as she passes, and Puffy stops.

“Be careful,” she says seriously.

“You, too,” Puffy replies.

Niki pauses for a moment, then darts forward to press her forehead against the helmet of Puffy’s suit. They rest there for a moment- just a moment- and then Puffy pulls back. She enters the airlock and seals the inner door, then opens the outer door and locks it in place. She waves to Niki, who watches until she’s out of view before returning to the lighting panel. Dream floats his way down a moment or two later, bomb held in both hands.

“Here we go,” Dream says tersely. Niki tapes the wire from the bomb to the wires from the lighting panel. “Bombs away.”

“We’re ready,” Sapnap says, floating back into the room. Techno nods as he takes his seat, Niki following a moment later.

“Point us in the right direction,” Techno orders.

“Copy,” Sapnap says, fiddling with the controls for the attitude adjusters.

“Pressure’s good,” Niki reports. “The seal’s holding.”

“Copy,” Techno says. “Time to intercept?”

“Twenty-eight seconds,” Niki gulps.

“We cut that pretty close,” Sapnap mutters.

“Dream and I are suited up and back in position,” Puffy reports. “Ready when you are.”

“You ready, Niki?” Techno asks.

“Yes,” Niki replies. “All I have to do is hit enter.”

“Sapnap, how’s our angle?”

“Dead-on, Commander.”

“Strap in,” Techno advises.

“Twenty seconds,” Niki says.

Techno takes a few deep breaths. This is going to be fine. They’re going to be fine. He doesn’t believe in a god, but he’ll pray to the stars. Maybe this time they’ll be listening.

“Five,” Niki says. “Four. Three.”

“Brace for acceleration,” Techno says.

“Two. One. Activating Lighting Panel 41.”

She presses enter.

The bomb isn’t horrible- Techno’s thrown back into his seat with the jerky motion, but it’s like being on a rollercoaster that only lasts four seconds. As soon as it’s over, Niki and Sapnap are busy typing away.

“Reactor room is still pressurized,” Sapnap says.

“Bridge seal holding,” Niki continues. “Obviously. Because we’re still alive.”

“Damage?” Sapnap asks.

“Nothing I can see yet,” Niki says. Techno turns his radio on. “But we’re at twelve for velocity.”

“George,” he says. “It worked. Dream’s on his way.”

“Score!” George cries gleefully.

“Dream, you’re up,” Techno says. “Twelve meters per second.”

“Close enough!” Dream says.

In the airlock, Dream adjusts his suit carefully. “I’m going to jump out,” he tells Puffy. “Should get me another two or three meters per second.”

“Right,” Puffy agrees. She’s got a loose grip on Dream’s tether. “Good luck, Dreamie.”

Dream salutes, then leaps out of the airlock.

Once he’s out, he collects his bearings quickly- a glance to the right shows him what he couldn’t see from inside the airlock.

“I have a visual!” he yells. “I can see the MAV!”

The MAV barely resembles a spacecraft- the one sleek lines are now a jagged mess of missing hull segments and empty anchor points where components JPL deemed noncritical are supposed to be.

“Jesus, George, what did you *do* to that thing?” Dream asks.

“You should see what I did to the rover,” George responds, and Dream can practically picture the

grin on his face. God, he's missed this. He's missed George.

There's still too much that can go wrong. He's got to get to the MAV.

It's something he's practiced many times, and although in the practice sessions they were assuming he'd be rescuing a crewmate whose tether broke, the concept is pretty much the same. George's tether just broke eighteen months ago on the desolate red planet below them.

"Niki, you got me on radar?" Dream asks as he makes his way toward the MAV.

"Affirmative," Niki says.

"Call out my relative velocity to George every two seconds or so."

"Copy. Five point two meters per second."

"Hey, Dream, the front's wide open," George says, as if Dream didn't already know this and wasn't cursing out the Hab canvas in the back of his mind this whole time. "I'll get up there and be ready to grab you."

"Negative," Techno interrupts. "No untethered movement. Stay strapped to your chair until you're latched to Dream." His voice is tense, strained. He's nervous. Techno's never nervous.

"Copy," George says.

"Three point one meters per second."

"Going to coast for a bit," Dream says. "Gotta catch up before I slow it down."

"Eleven meters to target."

"Copy."

“Six meters.”

“Counter-thrusting.” Dream fires the MMU thrusters again. The MAV looms before him.
“Velocity?”

“One point one meters per second.”

“Good enough,” Dream says. “I’m drifting toward it. I think I can get my hand on some of the torn canvas.”

The tattered canvas is beckoning to him. It’s the only handhold on the otherwise smooth ship. Dream reaches out, straining, and manages to grab hold.

“Contact!” he yells. He strengthens his grip, then pulls his body forward to lash out with his other hand and grab more canvas. “Firm contact!”

“Dream,” Puffy says. “We’ve passed the closest approach p[oint and you’re getting farther away. You have a hundred and sixty-nine meters of tether left. Enough for fourteen seconds.”

“Copy,” Dream says, pulling himself toward the opening.

And there he is. There’s George, strapped to his chair, staring back at him. It’s the most beautiful thing Dream has ever seen, and he’s been in space for more than two years.

“Visual on George!” he cries, trying not to cry.

“Visual on Dream!” George says, sounding thrilled. Dream’s choked up as he pulls himself into the ship.

“How are you doing, Georgie?” he asks.

“I just-” George says, cutting himself off. “Give me a minute. You’re the first person I’ve seen in eighteen months.”

“We don’t have a minute,” Dream advises, kicking off the wall. “We’ve got roughly eleven seconds before we run out of tether.”

Dream makes his way to the chair, and George grips his arms to keep him from bouncing away. They allow themselves a second- just a second and then Dream says, “Contact with George!”

“Eight seconds,” Puffy says.

“Copy.”

Dream hastily latches the front of his suit to the front of George’s with the tether clips. “Connected.”

“Restraints off,” George says.

“We’re out of here,” Dream says with a grin. The two float across the MAV cabin to the opening. Dream pushes off the edge as they pass through, still gripping George’s arm. “We’re out.”

“Five seconds.”

“Relative velocity twelve meters per second,” Niki says quickly.

“Thrusting,” Dream says, activating the MMU. They accelerate for a few seconds, and then the MMU controls on Dream’s display turn red.

“Out of fuel,” he reports. “Velocity?”

“Five meters per second,” Niki says.

“Stand by,” Puffy says. She grips the remainder of Dream’s tether with both hands, gently allowing it to create friction, and carefully tries to find the right balance to pull them in.

“Velocity zero!” Niki cries.

“Reel them in, Puffy,” Techno orders.

“Copy,” Puffy says. She carefully pulls the two toward the airlock, and after a few seconds, just pulls in the excess line as the two drift toward her. They both grab handholds on the walls as Puffy closes the outer door.

“Aboard!” Dream yells.

“Airlock 2 outer door closed!” Puffy says.

“Yes!” Sapnap cries joyfully. There’s an energy around the ship, like something Dream’s never felt before- they did it. After eighteen months, George is back with them.

“Copy,” Techno says.

And Techno’s voice echoes across the world: “Houston, this is *Hermes* Actual. Six crew safely aboard.”

Chapter End Notes

WOOO!!! The launch is over, and with it, the end of 'The Martian' canon. However, this fic is far from finished. After all, there's a long way to home....

[twitter](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated!

Ouranos

Chapter Notes

okay hi some notes before part two begins!!!

if you'd like, check out some very very cool art made by [hestia](#) and [nood](#) for this fic!

[crew](#)

[george](#)

[pathfinder](#)

i fucking ADORE art being made of my stuff and y'all,,,, nood and hestia are both so sweet and you should totally go check them out

second, i finally made my [spotify playlist](#) for this fic public, so check that out if you want! i particularly recommend the first three songs on the playlist, those are the ones i've been blasting since the beginning

finally, i got terrified that the comments on this fic were gonna outnumber the kudos so i deleted a bunch of my responses and didn't respond to every comment on the last chapter. just know that i appreciate every single one of you so fucking much, and every notification i get absolutely makes my day!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George is on the ship. He's safely on *Hermes*, and Dream is still clutching his arms, and Puffy is pulling both of them further in. His ribs, which had been sore before, are now positively screaming. To keep himself from bursting everyone's eardrums, he mutes his mic and then lets out a loud groan of pain.

It just gets worse as Dream pulls him farther into the ship. He thinks Puffy is telling him to go limp, to let them deal with pushing him around. He manages to give her a thumbs-up, and then his vision sort of blurs in and out for a moment, along with every other one of his senses. There's a loud ringing in his ears and he knows he's about to get hit with a bad case of acceleration sickness that's going to last for who knows how long. He knows how it works, it'll probably come and go, and right now, it's coming.

There are muffled voices, sounding panicked, and he attempts to wave them off before he realizes he can't feel his limbs. So he remains still, as he was trained to do, and waits for it to pass. His ears slowly stop ringing and his eyes slowly begin to clear. His whole body is buzzing, aching, and he shifts. His vision immediately clouds up again and he holds still for another moment.

When he comes back into focus, Dream is looking at him, terrified, frozen in place. Puffy is calling his name repeatedly, and there are at least three other voices in his ear also screaming at him. He unmutes his mic.

"I'm fine," he chokes out. His mouth is dry and there's a sick taste in his throat. "I muted so you didn't all hear me screaming like a little girl."

"As soon as the ship repressurizes, I'm on my way," Niki says. "Stay put until I get there."

Which, alright. It's not like he's going anywhere. Sapnap gives them the all-clear a few minutes later, and Dream and Puffy both take their EVA suits off. George remains floating, helpless, because every time he tries to move his arms his ribs scream in pain and he has to bite his lip to prevent himself from crying out and worrying the crew.

It's too late, apparently, based on the very worried looks Dream and Puffy are giving him. Dream reaches out, wordless, and George nods to him that he can come forward. Carefully, his best friend, the love of his life, unlocks the suit and takes his helmet off.

And then George is looking at Dream, no spacesuit between them, just solid and there and real. Dream floats forward slowly, trying not to jostle George around, and presses their foreheads together. They're close, so close, just breathing in each other's air, and Dream laughs.

"What?" George asks, and he's smiling so hard he thinks his face might hurt more than his ribs.

"You smell like shit," Dream tells him, and they both laugh. It kills his ribs, but it's worth it. Puffy snorts behind them, attempting to tug Dream back.

"You really do, George," she says. Niki, Sapnap, and Techno all float into the hallway a few moments later, looking overjoyed.

"Please don't collide with me," George says quickly. "I am one good jostle away from screaming

and I have been very careful to not do that out of extreme courtesy to you all.”

“Noted,” Techno says with a dry grin. Sapnap looks like he’s about to collide with George anyways, but Puffy pushes off the wall to dart forward and hold him back. Niki slides past them, grabbing his arm carefully.

“Hi,” she says gently. “We’ve gotta do X-rays, okay? See if you broke a rib. Or several.”

“Okay,” George says, nodding. “Okay. Wait, before you do, Techno-”

“Yeah?” Techno says, one eyebrow raised, like he knows exactly what George is going to say.

“I fucking hate Pigstep,” George says. “And I really needed to say that to your face.”

Techno looks- honestly, he looks like he might cry. This is the most emotional George has ever seen him. It’s probably the most emotional he’s seen any of the crew, because they’re all here again, all of them together, and-

“Reunions later,” Niki orders. “X-rays and medical exam now.”

“Right,” Techno says. “The rest of you, check the ship for damage. No complaints, we can talk to George once he’s had a shower.”

“Yeah,” George laughs. He winces, and everyone looks at him with concern and pity. He fucking hates that look, so he soldiers on through the pain. “That sounds really, really nice.”

Niki gestures for everyone to get out of the way and carefully starts to move George. He yelps and lashes out, unconsciously grabbing Dream’s hand and squeezing hard. Dream pauses, looks at him, then looks to Techno. George also looks at Techno, pleadingly, because he doesn’t think he can bear being separated from Dream right now.

“Dream, help Niki get him to the medbay,” Techno orders. George doesn’t miss the grateful look Dream sends the Commander, and he sends one himself. Techno nods and floats off after Puffy and Sapnap, ready to do checks on the ship.

George tries not to scream in pain as Niki and Dream carefully get the rest of the EVA suit off of him. He holds as still as possible as they float him down to the medbay and get him in front of the X-ray machine. He's gripping Dream's hand the entire time, half to keep himself from floating away, half because it hurts. And also because he wants to, and he figures he should be allowed to do things he wants to do after everything he's been through.

"Yup," Niki says after a few minutes. "Two cracked ribs. Nothing serious, they didn't puncture anything, they should heal in about six weeks. Do you care about that shirt immensely, George, or can I cut it off? I just need to make sure there's nothing that needs bandaging."

The idea of lifting up his arms right now is fucking terrible, in all honesty. The idea of moving at all is terrible. He hasn't had access to painkillers in a long time, and right now, he's really thinking he could use some. He thinks that he should probably ask, they definitely have some on the ship, Niki could get them easily-

Which brings him back to Niki, who's staring at him expectantly. Right. He's around other people now, and they can't read his mind. He cringes- that's something he's going to have to get used to. Verbal communication. He's only talked to himself and a camera and other inanimate objects in the past eighteen months.

"Cut it off," he groans. He tries not to flinch when Niki comes at him with the scalpel, looking at Dream instead, meaning he gets to see the shocked look on Dream's face when Niki cautiously peels the sweat-soaked shirt off of him. "What?"

"Your-" Dream starts, gesturing with his free hand. George glances down at his stomach- Dream's looking at the long, jagged scar from when he first got hit by the communications disk, back when he was first left on Mars. It's the one he stitched up himself, the one that's been aching that he's been ignoring. He knows how to take care of scar tissue, he's just had other things on his mind. "Is that-"

"Yeah," George says, swallowing harshly. He was kind of hoping none of them would ever see it, or the other scars littering his skin- the burn on his shoulder from the first time he got caught in an explosion, the one trailing across his entire back from that time the airlock in the Hab blew and destroyed all his crops, the pickpocket mess of little white lines covering his body. He was hoping that his scars would remain his. He doesn't think anything will be able to just be his anymore, not if he's as famous as Wilbur joked he is.

Dream is still looking at the longest scar. He hasn't noticed the other ones yet. George clears his throat. "That's it."

Dream isn't meeting George's eyes. His eyes are watering, and George pulls his gaze away before *he* starts crying. Niki floats a bit closer, bandages in hand. She examines the wound closely.

"You stitched this yourself?" she asks, and it takes George a moment to process that the crew doesn't know everything that happened to him. They have *no idea* what he went through, the things he did, the times he blew himself up, how close he came to death again and again and again-

"Yup," he says, cutting off that train of thought before it gets too far. "It tore a few times, I just stitched it back up again-"

"Jesus," Dream mutters. There's something in his voice, a choked-off quality that George doesn't think he has the mental capacity to process right now. He resolutely doesn't look at the man whose hand he's holding.

"Well, it looks alright," Niki says. She takes a look over the rest of his upper body, frowning the whole time. There are a few cuts and a litany of bruises, and she puts bandages on the few that are bleeding and avoids touching the bruises. "You're clearly all healed up, we'll just have to make sure we're taking care of the scar tissue on that big one. Here are some painkillers, this should tide you over for around six hours, I'll wake you up then to get you some more. I'm going to do a more thorough exam once you're showered and rested, okay?"

"Yeah," George says. "Yeah, about showering-"

"I am not helping you shower," Niki interrupts. She's smiling now, and he tries to smile back at her. She hands him the painkillers and he gulps them down quickly. Great, alright, so Dream's going to help him shower and Dream still isn't even looking at him, awesome. "I'm going to go make sure everything else on the ship is alright. Dream, please stay with George."

"I was planning on it," Dream says. Niki nods and floats off, and Dream finally looks back down at him. George meets his eyes, waits for him to speak. "I'm sorry," Dream breathes out. The tears in his eyes are gone, and he gives George's hand a squeeze. "I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," George replies simply, because it is. "You guys didn't know, and I'm here now-"

"That doesn't matter," Dream says. "*We left you there -*"

“Because you thought I was dead,” George finishes patiently. “And you had complete reason to. It’s *okay*, Dream.”

“It’s not-”

“Dream.” George gets up and twists, ignores the pain in his chest, and puts both hands on Dream’s shoulders. Dream’s words die in his throat, and George looks directly into his eyes, holding his gaze. Dream’s words die out.

George moves forward first, wrapping his arms around Dream’s neck and burying his head in his chest. His ear is pressed against his heart, and he can hear it stutter, then continue on steady. It’s grounding, it’s reminding him he’s alive, and a moment later, Dream wraps his arms around George’s waist. He doesn’t squeeze, ever careful about the broken ribs, but there’s a slight pressure that reminds him where he is.

On the ship. On *Hermes*. With Dream. Dream, right here, heart beating, alive, alive, alive.

George doesn’t let go. Dream doesn’t let go. They float there in place and they hold each other and they are floating and their hearts are beating, and George thinks *yes, this is right, this is why he has survived*. For this moment, right here. For all the moments like it that will come after.

His ribs do not let him remain there for long. He taps Dream’s shoulder blade to let him know his chest is protesting the prolonged contact, and Dream pulls back with a reluctant smile. There are tears in his eyes again.

“I need a fucking shower,” George says, and Dream laughs and wipes at his eyes, keeping one hand on the small of George’s back, like if he lets go George will float away.

Which, technically, he will. But that’s not important. What’s important is he’s not really going anywhere, never again, not if he has anything to say about it. He remembers hoping, endlessly, back while he was on Mars, that some day they’d get back to Earth and the crew would all live near each other, see each other every day, be happy. Now that might get to happen.

“Yeah,” Dream agrees. “You do. Let’s get you to your quarters.”

Dream wraps his arm around George’s waist and George smiles, leans his head on Dream’s

shoulder. Dream uses his free hand to propel them to the quarters George hasn't slept in in eighteen months. The ship is spinning again by the time they make it down to the rooms, so the centripetal gravity is acting and they're able to walk down the hallway.

George takes approximately four steps before he collapses. Dream doesn't even hesitate before scooping him up to carry him bridal-style, always careful in his movements. George wraps his arms around Dream's neck and giggles, actually giggles, and he can't remember the last time he felt this content. The painkillers have started to kick in by the time they make it to the shower, so it doesn't hurt too badly when Dream sets him down. Dream starts the shower and George just stands there for a moment, staring, not moving.

There's a mirror in the bathroom. He's looking at himself and he barely recognizes the man he sees- he's thin. Too thin. There are scars marking his story, all over his arms and chest and stomach, so many of them. Too many of them. His hair has grown longer than he likes to keep in and there's a bit of stubble on his chin and dark circles under his eyes. There's something else there, too, a kind of rigid determination that he hasn't seen in himself before. He's going to survive, and he's going to keep surviving.

"Okay," Dream says. "I'll just- I'll wait outside."

"Yeah," George replies, startling out of his mini-stupor. He's been having too many of those already, he thinks, and he reminds himself not to pin the blame on anyone. Including himself. He's so used to only having himself around for company, it's going to take a while to adjust to having other people to talk to again. Dream awkwardly shuffles past him and closes the door.

The shower is the best shower of George's life. Eighteen months without enough water to wash himself and now, hyped up on painkillers and adrenaline, the water rushing down feels incredible. His ribs are still hurting and now that he has time to think about it his scar tissue is aching, but he's clean, and he feels wonderful.

Of course, the adrenaline is fading as soon as he steps out of the shower, and his head is starting to droop. He towels himself off quickly and finds a pair of soft clothes waiting on the counter, probably set there by Dream while he was lost in thought under the warm water. After he slips the clothes on, he makes his way out.

Dream is pacing back and forth in his room, and he stops when he sees George. He stares for a moment and George runs a hand through his hair self-consciously.

"What?" he says. "Do I still look like shit?"

“No!” Dream says hurriedly. “You look- I mean-”

“I’m messing with you, Dream.” Dream relaxes a bit and smiles at him, and George makes his way to the bed. “I’m going to take a twelve-hour nap, I think.”

“Niki wants you to sleep in the medbay for the time being,” Dream tells him. “Just while you’re healing.”

George gets that there’s something more, something lying under the surface of that comment, but he doesn’t know exactly what it is. He nods and walks with Dream toward the medbay. At some point during the journey, his hand brushes against Dream’s, and he laces their fingers together without a second thought.

It’s a reminder, he thinks. That he’s with other people now. He’s immensely touch-starved and he knows it, so he makes a mental note to let the crew know later that he’s going to be casually touching them at every opportunity. Somehow, he doesn’t think they’ll mind.

There’s no gravity in the hallway going from the rooms to the medbay, so he gets to float again, however briefly. God, he loves space. Now that he knows he’s probably going to live long enough to see Earth again, the lack of gravity reminds him why he wanted to be an astronaut so much in the first place. To be free.

He’s had enough of the freedom of space for one lifetime, he thinks. It’s still beautiful- the primordial deities of the sky call out to him and he thinks *yes, Ouranos, I am here*, but he will not be here for much longer. And that’s okay.

“Hey,” Niki says brightly when they enter the medbay. “The bed’s all prepped for you, take a nap, I’ll wake you up in a few, okay?”

“Okay,” George agrees. He’s barely down in the bed when he loses consciousness, and the last thing he thinks before he goes is that the warm pressure of Dream’s hand still in his is one of the best feelings in the universe.

NASA Director Phil Watson stands on the podium, a hundred reporters crammed into the room and waving microphones to pick up his words. Fundy, Wilbur, Quackity, Bad- they're all standing behind him, beaming, and outside the whole world is waiting to hear what he has to say.

"It is my great pleasure to announce that as of about two hours ago, Doctor George Davidson is safely aboard the *Hermes* flight vessel," Phil says, and the room bursts into applause. "His health is being continuously monitored by the team's medical professional, Doctor Niki Nihachu. We will update you when we have further information. *Hermes* is currently on track to get the Ares III crew home on schedule, in 211 days' time."

With that, he steps down from the podium, and Fundy steps up to answer any further questions and close out the press conference. Phil waves a hand, and the other three quickly follow him out into the hallway.

"We need to go talk to our VIP guests, let them know what's going on," Phil says. He's referring to the family of the crew, the ones who were sitting with them, watching the launch. "Quackity, Wilbur, go do that."

They both look like they have something else they want to say, but head off when he gives them a stern look. Bad shoves his hands in his pockets and stares Phil down.

"I was going to ask for your resignation after all the stunts you've pulled," Phil says. "But you're one of the best flight directors we've ever had, and it worked. Your stupid Tubbo Underscore Maneuver worked, telling the crew he was alive worked, it all worked."

Bad says nothing. Phil continues.

"If they all make it back alive, you're keeping your position. You're still well on track to becoming the next Director of NASA, and I'm not going to change that. But if they don't make it back--"

"They'll make it back," Bad interrupts. Phil gives him a look that clearly says *don't cut me off*. Bad ignores it. "They're going to make it back, and they're going to bring George with them. Trust me, Phil."

"That's the problem," Phil snorts. "I do."

Down the hall, Wilbur and Quackity quickly move when they realize Phil and Bad are heading back their way. Of course they were eavesdropping, Wilbur thinks, he needs to know if his friend is about to be fired. Granted, he's still a bit mad about the whole mutiny thing, but in the end, Bad was just passing along the information. At least, that's what Tommy yelled at him over dinner several times. Wilbur guesses it's finally getting through his head.

Everyone is still celebrating in Mission Control, several people in the back talking to each other. Wilbur spots Tubbo Underscore chatting with Tommy and a kid from the astronaut training program he thinks is called Ranboo and makes his way over.

"How'd you two get an invite?" he asks Tubbo and Ranboo, throwing an arm around Tommy's shoulders. Tommy makes a noise of complaint and shoves him off.

"Oh, we're both related to the crew," Tubbo says brightly, Ranboo nodding in agreement. Wilbur stares at them.

"You're kidding," he says slowly. "Tubbo fucking Underscore is related to one of the *Hermes* crew members? Which one?"

"Cara," he says. "Er- Captain Cara Puffy. She's my half-sister."

"Jesus," Wilbur mutters. "Big NASA family?"

"Sort of, sir, my half-brother doesn't work for NASA- he's around here somewhere, I actually don't know where he is-" Tubbo cuts himself off, looking slightly terrified. Wilbur turns to Ranboo.

"And you?" he asks.

"Niki," he says. "Is my sister. Doctor Niki Nihachu."

"Jesus Christ," Wilbur says again. "I knew Niki had a brother, I just didn't know he was-"

"Freakishly tall?" Tommy asks.

“Working for NASA?” Tubbo chimes in.

“In the astronaut program *and* a meteorologist?” Tommy adds.

“-you,” Wilbur finishes. “I didn’t know he was you.”

“Well, he is,” Ranboo says, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. “Thanks for not killing my sister, I guess.”

“Yeah, thanks for agreeing to my plan,” Tubbo says, and he’s got a look on his face that says he clearly knows Wilbur did not initially want to use his maneuver. He’s not going to say anything, though, not with so many people around. Techno’s already going to be under heavy investigation when he gets back, he doesn’t need the media or the investigations committee knowing about the actual mutiny that went on.

“Of course,” Wilbur says carefully. “Thank you for coming up with it. It saved George’s life.”

“I know,” Tubbo says. He smiles at Wilbur in that way that says *time for you to go* and Wilbur is a little bit terrified. Not just of Tubbo, of all three of them- barely out of college kids that are clearly set up to be NASA’s future. Wilbur’s going to retire some day and he’s gonna leave Tommy fucking Innit in his wake.

He nods to the three of them and makes his way through the room to Bad, who’s talking quietly with a man Wilbur recognizes but can’t place. They’re whispering conspiratorially, sending glances toward the rest of Mission Control every now and then, and they glance over when Wilbur approaches and stop talking.

“Hey, Bad,” he says. He places a name to a face quickly when he can actually see the man Bad is talking to- Sapnap’s husband. “And... Karl, right?”

“Right,” Karl says, nodding. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Listening to the crew,” Karl clarifies. “Sap told me about everything. Thank you for not disabling Puffy’s remote override hacking.”

Wilbur pauses. Maybe more people know about the mutiny than he thought. And though he has a job to do, his number one priority is protecting Technoblade.

“No one else knows?” he asks. “You haven’t told anyone, I mean?”

Karl gives him an odd look. Bad wanders off to talk to someone Wilbur thinks is his husband.

“No,” Karl says eventually. “I haven’t told anyone. But if I had, it wouldn’t matter much.”

It sounds vaguely like a threat. Wilbur narrows his eyes.

“What is it that you do, Mister Jacobs?” he asks.

“Doctor Jacobs,” Karl corrects him. “I’m a historian. But I know how court martialing works, and I know how NASA investigations usually end up. If your committee tries to pin the blame for the mutiny on the Commander, the whole crew is going to go down with him, by their own volition. Make sure you know that.”

Wilbur pauses. He’d been so focused on protecting Techno from the investigations committee that he didn’t even think about the fact that the rest of the crew would willingly follow him down. If George’s rescue has proven one thing, it’s that the Ares III crew sticks together.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he says, nodding to Karl. Karl nods back and wanders off after Bad. Wilbur stands there for a moment or two, eyes scanning the room. Quackity is talking to a man that Wilbur is ninety percent sure is Puffy’s brother Schlatt. Fundy and Phil are in the back, murmuring to each other. There’s a girl about Tommy’s age talking with Wilbur’s pseudo-younger brother, and behind him, an older woman talking to a middle-aged couple. Wilbur doesn’t want to eavesdrop, but he totally does.

He knows the older woman is Dream’s mother simply because they look nearly identical. The other two are George’s parents, which Wilbur knows because he was the one that first told them

George was alive and had been left on Mars.

“I knew they’d go back,” Dream’s mother is saying. “You should hear the way Dream talks about George. He won’t shut up about him. Every email, it’s George this, George that, Drista’s getting sick of it, she wants to hear about her brother, not his crush.”

“George is the same,” George’s mother gushes. “I swear, he’s alone on Mars and when we had communication with him, every email had something about Dream in it. I do hope they work things out...”

Huh, Wilbur thinks. He could sort of see that going on, the two astronauts floating around each other before the mission started, during training and team bonding. And although he knows that on a normal mission romantic fraternization is heavily discouraged, this isn’t really a normal mission. Not anymore.

He makes his way back toward Fundy and Phil as he thinks, and by the time he’s gotten to them, their hushed conversation seems to have come to a close.

“What’s going on?” he asks when they both give him a look.

“We’re debating how much about George’s health we can release to the press,” Phil murmurs. “And here probably isn’t the best place to talk about it. We got a report in from Dr. Nihachu. Two cracked ribs, she hasn’t run full diagnostics yet because he passed out. Normally, in a bed, nothing dramatic.” He rushes to assure Wilbur of this last part when Wilbur sends him a worried look.

“Alright,” Wilbur says with a nod. “We can discuss that later, once we’ve got the full rundown. And- Fundy? Try not to say too much more than whatever you’re asked. Right now we’re going off the high of rescuing George. There are still two hundred and eleven days until the crew is home, and that’s two hundred and eleven days where things could go wrong.”

“Right,” Fundy says with a nod. “Got it. Two hundred and eleven days.”

“Two hundred and eleven days,” Phil echoes. “God, they’ve got to make it now.”

George isn't alone when he wakes up, which is good, he thinks. Dream is still sitting next to him, one hand clutching George's and the other paging through a book. George sits up with a groan- the painkillers have definitely worn off.

"Hey, hey, hey," Dream says quickly, setting the book to the side. "Take it easy. You just slept for, like, fourteen hours."

"It feels like it," George mutters. "I think that's the best sleep I've had in months. Have you been here the whole time?"

"We took turns," Dream says, shaking his head. He hands George a few painkillers, which George takes greedily. "A couple of hours for each of us. Everyone's missed you, they're all really excited to talk to you. Niki says she'll put off the check-up until you've gotten a chance to see everyone."

"Good," George says. "I kind of want to hit Techno just for all the Pigstep."

Dream laughs, and God, George has missed that classic wheeze. It's one of the most beautiful sounds he's ever heard.

"You're on *Hermes* now," Dream says through his laughter. "NASA can send us all the music you want."

"Thank God for small blessings," George grumbles, pulling himself out of bed. He's completely leaning on Dream for support- not that Dream's complaining. At least, out loud. He pulls away quickly just in case Dream does mind, but Dream reaches out for him like he thinks George is falling. "Sorry," he mutters. "I can stop being touchy-"

"Don't," Dream interrupts quickly. He pauses, looking like he wants to back-track. "I mean. Don't. It's probably not healthy, you haven't had contact with anyone for eighteen months, so- we all talked about it. Being touch-starved, I mean. Niki told us we're legally required to have physical contact with you whenever you want it."

"Really?" George asks, raising an eyebrow. "I don't think that's a legal thing-"

“Legalities don’t matter, you’re touch-starved, we’ve missed you,” Dream says dismissively, waving a hand. The other hand finds George’s waist again, and Dream pulls him in close. “God, I forgot how short you are.”

“Fuck off,” George says, but there’s no malice behind it. Dream just grins down at him.

The crew is waiting for them on the bridge, and when they get there, Sapnap is the first to propel himself forward. There’s no gravity and George enjoys the feeling of floating again, at least, until Sapnap barrels into him.

“God, I’ve missed you, you dumb bitch,” Sapnap mutters, burying his head in George’s shoulder. George laughs and brings his arms around Sapnap’s back, hugging him tightly. The pain in his ribs does not matter in this moment, not when Dream wraps his arms around both of them and Puffy and Niki both dart in to the group hug and Technoblade reluctantly joins in.

This is one of those moments that matters, he thinks. This is what he stayed alive for- his crew, surrounding him, keeping him safe. He survived for the moments where all of space is around them, big and beautiful, and the only thing he can look at is them.

These moments can’t last forever, though. Techno is the first to pull back, and the others follow- apart from Sapnap, who continues clinging to George like if he lets go, George will disappear again.

“How are you feeling?” Niki asks. George is able to see her face from over Sapnap’s shoulder- she looks worried. He attempts to shrug. Sapnap’s grip does not let him.

“Sore,” he tells her. “Still tired, I think.”

Niki purses her lips. There’s something she’s not telling him. He’ll save that for later- right now, Puffy is prying Sapnap off of him so she can get her turn in hugging him. She spins them around gently, and George grins and rests his head on her shoulder.

“It’s good to see you, Georgie,” she says. “You’re looking better already.”

George knows it’s a lie. They’re all looking at him like they’re afraid he’ll snap- he knows he’s malnourished, but he didn’t think it was that bad. Maybe it’s just because he’s gotten used to

looking down and being able to count his ribs.

Puffy gently floats off, leaving a clear path for Techno. The Commander sighs and starts, forward, opening his arms. George grins and sinks into them, mutters something about Techno's taste in music that leaves them all laughing, and pulls back.

His vision is still slightly blurry around the edges- that'd be the acceleration sickness, he thinks. He knows there's bound to be a hundred emails from people at NASA. Somewhere, there are eighteen months' worth of video recordings detailing his every thought, from hopeful to downright suicidal. And none of it matters, because Dream is putting his arm back around George's waist and then Sapnap is dragging them all in for another group hug.

The future can wait. George is going to enjoy right now.

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

comments/kudos/subs/etc are always appreciated!

Asclepius

Chapter Notes

dare i say, the calm before the storm? :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Niki does not let them remain in their group hug for long.

This is mostly because George lets out a small noise of complaint when he gets jostled, and she pulls him out of the group immediately.

“Come on,” she says firmly. “Full check-up time.”

She’s worried about George. She’s worried about all of them, really, just because that’s who she is as a person, but she’s especially worried about George. She’s been thinking about the medical consequences of living long-term under a different gravitational field for months now, and with him finally here, her mind has been racing.

George keeps a tight grip on her arm as she guides them away, waving to the rest of the crew. Dream looks like he’s about to follow, and she gives him a small shake of her head. He nods.

She talked to all of them about the risks George will be facing while he was asleep. They all understand how horrible things could be. Now she just needs to explain them to George himself. There are too many possibilities, each of them only worsened by the fact that they know so little about the actual effects of long-term exposure to Mars’s atmosphere.

“Okay,” she says when they get back to the medbay, feet hitting the ground firmly. George stumbles a bit as he makes his way over to the exam table. He stares at it for a moment, then turns back to her.

“I definitely can’t, like, hoist myself up onto this,” he says.

“Good,” she tells him. “I’m glad you recognize that.” Because she is. Because if George can take care of himself that makes her job so much easier. “Take a seat on your bed, we can just do it

there.”

He nods and makes his way over, and she grabs her tools before following him. She kicks one of the rolling chairs over and sits down across from him.

“So,” she says. “Before we start, I just need to tell you some of the risks.”

“Risks?”

“On your health. The crew’s already been informed, so they know what to watch out for, but you obviously need to know too. You’ve been on Mars for a long time, and that means Mars gravity, Mars radiation, and long-term exposure to an environment whose effects we just don’t know enough about when it comes to the human body.”

“So there could be a million things wrong with me and you’d have no idea?” George asks. It comes off like he meant it to be joking, but instead he just sounds nervous. Niki doesn’t blame him. She’s nervous, too, and it’s not even her health at stake.

“Unfortunately, yes,” she says. “What we- being me and a team of medical doctors at NASA- are most concerned about is pulmonary fibrosis.”

George stares at her for a moment. Not at her, exactly, but past her. Off into the distance. Even if he’s looking at her, his gaze is unfocused, like he’s thinking. She can see the exact moment that he zones back in because he meets her eyes with a startle. “Niki,” he says patiently. “I do not know what that is.”

“You should, we were briefed on it extensively before the mission.” Again, she doesn’t blame him- he’s bound to have had other things on his mind. She would understand if he forgot their medical training from months before they even launched.

“Niki, I’m gonna be real honest with you, pulmonary fibrosis was not my main concern while I was on Mars.” His voice is dry, but he still sounds nervous. Maybe she should have let Dream come along.

“I understand. Would you like me to explain it to you?”

“Yes, please.”

“Pulmonary fibrosis is a lung disease,” she tells him. “It’s caused when lung tissue is too damaged or scarred. We have no idea what breathing artificial air for months did to your lungs, and we don’t have the tools on *Hermes* to find out. We just have the basic X-ray machine. So our main concern is making sure you don’t get pneumonia, which would certainly make your lungs worse and is entirely a possibility.”

“Don’t get pneumonia, got it,” George says with a nod. “Anything else I need to be worried about, Doc?”

“Do you want the good news or the bad news?”

“Bad, probably. I’m used to bad news.”

Which is the other thing- his *mental* health, not just his physical health. Niki’s no psychologist, so they’re going to try and get George back in contact with Alyssa as soon as he’s up to emailing people again.

“Alright,” she says. “Heart disease and pulmonary hypertension. Heart disease as a result of the hypertension, most likely, and hypertension due to strain on your lungs and blood pressure from the gravitational field and the radiation you may have been exposed to, as well as the immense strain of the MAV launch that broke your ribs.”

“Jesus,” George mutters. “Heart disease?”

“It’s entirely possible. I’m more worried about your lungs, honestly. Would you like the good news?”

“Yes, please.”

“You’re at a low risk for all of those things. Engineers and doctors analyzed your use of the Hab canvas to make your- was it a workshop, during the trip to Schiaparelli?”

“Bedroom,” George says, grinning. “It was my bedroom. I didn’t want to sleep all cramped up in the rover.”

“Even better,” Niki says. “The Hab’s canvas is designed to be protective against radioactive rays, meaning any time you spent in the Hab or even in that little room made of its canvas helped save your life. Of course, there was still all the time you spent doing EVAs, and any deterioration of the material, but ultimately when it comes to effects on your body from radiation you’re at a low risk.”

“Well that’s- good,” George says, nodding. “But?”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s a ‘but’ there, Niki.”

She sighs. Eighteen months alone, and he’s still good at reading her.

“But, the gravitational field is what we’re more worried about. We just- we need to make sure your lungs are okay, and that means you take it easy until we get back to Earth and you can be more fully assessed. That means no activities that may make you short of breath, including anything in the gym. And that means if there’s an emergency on board, you have to sit it out.”

As predicted, George does not seem to like this, not even a little bit. She prepares to get lectured at.

“Niki,” he says patiently. “I’m an engineer. Fixing things is what I do. And I’m also sort of a master of emergency situations- if something mechanically goes wrong on board, I have to be there to help.”

“No,” Niki says. She tries her best to keep her voice kind, patient, because she really has no idea what he’s going through, what’s going through his head. She couldn’t even take a guess, really. “What you *have* to do is keep yourself safe and healthy. That’s *my* job, and I am not going to fail at my job, okay? I’m going to keep you alive.”

There are tears in her eyes because God, she’s missed him, and she wasn’t there to help him, and the scars covering his body are a testament to that. George freezes and stands up, reaching out. He

pulls her into a hug and she hugs him back tightly, not too tight, making sure not to hurt his ribs.

“I’m sorry,” she murmurs as she pulls back. “Just- please understand.”

“I do,” George says, nodding, and she knows he does. She knows he does understand, but that when it comes down to it, he won’t listen to her. But as long as he understands, that’s enough for now. “I do, Niki, I promise.”

“Okay,” she says, nodding. She wipes her eyes and clears her throat. “Another thing- the pulmonary fibrosis is really only a risk if you catch pneumonia, which is a high possibility with broken ribs. I know it’s going to hurt, but you need to be breathing deeply. Like, all the time.”

“Awesome,” George mutters. “So I’m gonna be in constant pain for a while?”

“And it’s going to keep you from needing a lung transplant when we’re back on Earth,” Niki says with a nod. “Other than taking it easy and taking deep breaths, you’re severely malnourished. We’re going to work on building your strength back up through a careful diet. NASA’s best nutritionists worked very hard on it, making do with what we have on board, so please yell at them and not me.”

“Oh, God,” George says. “Get it over with.”

“There’s a lot of potatoes involved.”

“You’ve gotta be fucking kidding me,” he groans, and she laughs.

“I’m not,” she tells him. “It’s not too many, don’t worry. It’s just- carbs are what we need to get you back up to the normal weight range, and potatoes are what your body is used to. Other than that, we’ve got a whole slew of other nutritious items, but they’re all space food. So. Liquefied.”

“Great,” George mutters. “I go from eating potatoes to eating liquefied potatoes. Absolutely brilliant. Please tell me we at least have ketchup on board.”

“We do have ketchup on board,” Niki giggles, and George throws his arms up in joy. He winces

immediately after and slowly lowers them back down.

“I take it I shouldn’t be doing that?” he asks, and Niki laughs again as she shakes her head.
“Alright, Doc. Is that all? Can we get on with the check-up now?”

“One more thing,” she says. “Your mental health.”

“Oh boy,” George says.

“We’re getting you back in contact with Alyssa-”

“Thank God-”

“Shush. Communication will be primarily by email, but I also need you to know that if you need someone to actually talk to in real time, the whole crew is here for you. We love you a lot, George, and if you need *anything* from us, we’re all right here.”

“Thank you, Niki,” he says after a moment. “Um. Yeah. My mental health- I dunno. It’s weird. I’m getting used to the idea that I’m going to be around actual people again. I can’t just- get lost in my head. You know?”

Niki does not know. She nods anyways. He offers her a forced smile, and she takes a deep breath.

“Alright,” she says. “Let’s get on with the check-up.”

“Okay!” Puffy calls. “Personal materials have now been dispatched to your laptops! We do have a few all-crew video messages if we want to watch those first.”

“Pull them up,” Techno says. The crew is gathered in their recreation room, deemed the Rec, one of the smallest areas on the ship. Its size is not at all proportional to the amount of time they spend there. It’s been roughly eighteen hours since George was rescued, and all of them are piled together

on one of the two couches in the Rec.

Dream is laying on his back along the couch, with George perched carefully on his stomach and Sapnap and Niki both on his legs. Techno is sitting on the armrest, beckoning Puffy to bring her laptop over to play the video messages for them. Niki shifts over so Puffy can sit next to Techno, directly on top of Dream's ankles.

"Ow," Dream protests, but his grin shows it doesn't actually hurt. Puffy passes her laptop to Sapnap, who leans forward and places it on the table in front of the couch so they can all see. The first video is Phil Watson, Director of NASA. Techno, scrolling through his personal messages, sees that Phil also has an email for him directly. It's the first message Phil has sent him personally since the whole mutiny thing. He's not looking forward to reading that one.

"Hello, *Hermes* crew," Phil's voice booms. "Glad to be talking to you all together again. This message is to just let you know how proud NASA is- and the whole world, really. You've done an incredible job, saved a man's life, and set a precedent for all of space travel to come. I've sent personal messages to Commander Technoblade and Doctor Davidson, which you'll find amongst other things. The rest of you- thank you for doing what you do. Thank you for helping to bring George home.

"That being said- I figured I should let you know now. The media does not know about the mutiny. They think NASA agreed to offer the plan, and Commander Technoblade made the executive decision. Please do well to keep it that way.

"Thank you for your attention, and once again, I'm glad you're all reunited. We eagerly await your return to Earth."

They're silent for a moment after the message ends.

"They don't know about the mutiny?" Niki asks.

"Why would they?" Puffy snorts. "NASA wants to cover their ass."

"So it was a mutiny, then?" George asks, and they all look at him. George is looking at Techno. The Commander meets his gaze.

“Yes,” he says. “It was a mutiny.”

“We should be grateful they’re keeping it secret, then,” Sapnap says. “This way it’ll be harder for the investigations committee to pin blame on Techno.”

And that’s a stark reminder that Techno’s probably going to be under a lot of scrutiny when he gets back, because he’s the mission commander, he’s the one that left George on Mars, it’s his fault-

“Sapnap,” Puffy says harshly. She’s got one hand on Techno’s knee and she’s squeezing, hard, telling him to get out of his own head. “Play the next video.”

Sapnap leans forward and hits a button on Puffy’s laptop, and Wilbur’s face pops up.

“Hey guys!” he says brightly. “Good to talk to you all together. Well done, everyone! Remember that you’ve still got science tasks for the flight home, but feel free to take a few days to yourselves. We’re going to have the rest of you keep covering George’s tasks, at least while his ribs recover. Niki, if there are any further health complications, please let us know. Thank you, everyone, and again, great work!”

“That sounded horribly scripted,” Techno mutters, and the crew laughs. He knows Wilbur- Wilbur would be cursing them out (Techno in particular) if he had a word in what he was going to say to them. Sapnap leans forward again, and Bad’s face appears on the screen.

“Good job, guys,” he says, and he sounds exhausted. “Get home safe, yeah? We’re all still cheering you on.”

And that’s it. Somehow, it’s the most heartfelt of all the messages.

“That’s it,” Puffy tells them. “Just those three. Personal emails, videos, whatever, are all on your laptops. George, I think you broke the record for most personal communications in a day.”

“Good,” George says haughtily, jokingly. “I think I deserve it.”

“You do,” Puffy tells him honestly, standing up and walking back over to her station to look at her

emails. Niki gets up and follows her, and Dream all-but kicks Sapnap off of him and gently pushes George down so he can sit up, leaving George in his lap.

Jesus, Techno thinks. They could at least have a little bit of class if they're going to beat around the bush and not admit their feelings for each other.

Techno scrolls through his communications- a lot of mission updates, requests for statements from various news sources, a couple from various famous people that are all just basic congratulations. There are three, however, that stand out to him- Phil, Wilbur, and Tommy.

He opens Tommy's first, figuring it'll be the one that yells at him the least. Sure enough, it's four words in a very large font, reading '*GOOD JOB, BIG MAN.*' Awesome, Techno thinks. Thank you, Tommy. Very cool.

He opens the email from Wilbur next- it's very, very long and detailed, and he mostly just skims it. Most of it is boring, but the bit that stands out to him at the end just says, *I'm proud of you, Tech.* And, alright. He's not tearing up. He just cried yesterday, he's legally at his limit of tears for the week, he has a *reputation* to uphold.

Phil's message is longer than Tommy's but shorter than Wil's, which, thank God. He knows he's going to get a hell of a lecture from the Director when he gets back to Earth and they're in the privacy of Phil's office, but he's got two hundred and ten days to prepare himself for that one. Instead, Phil's letter starts with *Heya, mate*, and Techno nearly bawls.

Well, that's a lie. There may be a slight tear in his eye, but he doesn't come close to crying. Mostly because, yeah, he's still a little pissed at Phil, and by the tone of the letter Phil is still a little pissed at him, but they're men, so they aren't going to talk about their feelings until they all bubble over into a screaming match that the whole building can vaguely hear. He knows the rest of the crew would tell him that way of thinking is unhealthy, which is why he isn't going to mention it to the rest of the crew.

The rest of Phil's letter is mostly stuff about the press and the mutiny and the fact that he might get court-martialed, which, alright, whatever. There's a paragraph at the end that sings his praises and that boosts his ego a bit, knowing that Phil (albeit probably reluctantly) thinks he did a good job.

He can live with that. Knowing he has the grudging approval of his pseudo-family, and the eternal approval of the crew surrounding him. That's all that matters.

George scrolls through his laptop for the first time in eighteen months. Puffy's done him the great service of putting all the emails from after the rescue at the top, citing those as the most important. There are literally hundreds of messages in his inbox, which he really doesn't get, considering for most of them he was trapped on a different planet. But, he supposes, people wanted to email him. Have some sort of proof they tried to have contact with him even when it was hopeless.

He doesn't really like the idea of being famous, even if he's joked about it before. The idea of everyone on Earth knowing who he is- that's terrifying. And it's only solidified when he sees that one of the first emails is from the president of the United States.

Dream is sitting next to him on the couch, now, Sapnap on his other side. When George's breath hitches at the first few emails, Dream rests a hand on his back. George leans into the touch and opens the email from the president.

Dear Dr. Davidson,

Congratulations on your successful reunion with the Hermes . The entire world is watching you, cheering for you. You've done great things.

He clicks out of the email. He doesn't want to read the rest. His breath is picking up and he remembers what Niki told him, deep breaths or there's risk of pneumonia. He focuses on Dream and Sapnap's steady presences on either side of him and takes a few deep breaths in and out. It hurts like a bitch, but after a good minute, he feels more relaxed. The entire world isn't watching him, not yet- they can't see him when he's up here, surrounded by his friends.

He ignores the emails from other famous people and focuses on the ones from the people he knows personally. Seven from people at NASA, one from his parents, one from Karl. He decides to open the one from his parents first, knowing it's the most likely to make him cry.

It's a picture of them with a woman he doesn't recognize, each flashing a thumbs-up, with the message, *Just watched the successful launch. We love you, Georgie.* They're clearly in Mission Control at NASA, he can see Wilbur in the background.

He smiles to himself, sees how thrilled his parents look. They must've flown all the way in from England to Houston to watch.

"Dream," he mutters, leaning against his friend. He shows him the photo. "Do you recognize this woman? Those are my parents, but--"

"That's my mom," Dream says, eyes wide, and then he wheezes. "Dude! What's this from?"

"The launch," George says, also laughing. "They're at Mission Control, I can see Wilbur in the background, I guess they met each other."

"Funny," Dream says. "I wonder why they sent you a picture with her."

George stops. Why would they send a picture with Dream's mother? Unless...

Oh, God. He knew he was going to regret talking about Dream so much in those emails he sent to them while he was on Mars and still had contact with NASA. His parents definitely, definitely know about the fact that he's in love with Dream.

Oh, well. They were bound to find out eventually, he guesses, when he bucks up the courage to tell Dream how he feels. He was going to tell his mom before that, but he supposes the fact that she worked it out on her own is better.

"I wonder," he says, trying to control the heat rising to his face. He marks the email as Important and moves on to the next one. He chooses the one from Karl, opens it, and is immediately bombarded by a message in all-caps.

GEORGE, it reads, and God, George can imagine Karl screaming it as he hugs him, and God, he can't wait to get back to Earth.

GEORGE,

HOLY HONK. I KNEW YOU'D DO IT! I KNEW IT! IT'S SO GOOD TO EMAIL YOU AND KNOW YOU'LL GET MY MESSAGE BECAUSE YOU'RE ALIVE!

Seriously, dude, it's so good to have you back. I can't wait to see you again. I knew they'd get you back safe and sound- God, I'm proud of you, George. You did so good!

I'll make sure things on Earth stay normal until you get back. NASA's gonna have a hard time getting rid of me. And now that you're back, I know there's someone keeping Sapnap in line up there!

I love you, George, and I'm so glad you're alive. I hope everything health-wise is okay- NASA won't tell us anything- and I'll see you back on Earth soon. You've gotta be my best man at the big white wedding, remember?

See you soon! :D

Karl

He grins to himself and peers over Sapnap's shoulder- he's also reading an email from Karl, based on the caps, and George catches a few words that he really didn't need to see and looks back at his own screen.

The first email from an official NASA email address is from Tubbo Underscore. The subject is just 'WATCH OUT,' which is vaguely concerning. George opens that one first.

Congrats, big man. Glad everything worked out. You are not going to be pleased with the investigations. Just so you know.

Tubbo Underscore

Astrodynamics

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Oh, great. He'd almost forgotten about that- the message Wilbur send him who knows how long ago, saying that they might have some questions for him. He hasn't had to answer any yet, but he knows as soon as things die down that'll probably be first on NASA's list. He's not going to testify against Techno- hell, he'll make it clear that it wasn't Techno's fault. Something tells him he's probably going to have to make sure Techno knows that, too.

There are emails from Tommy, Fundy, Quackity, Wilbur, Bad, and Phil. He goes through them quickly, laughing at some parts, going quiet at others.

BIG MAN GEORGE!

Wilbur says I should be more formal with you, after everything. Bollocks to that, I say, I spent eighteen months being your glorified paparazzi, I think I deserve to be a little informal with you.

I'm glad you're alive. I'm glad I was able to keep track of you. Otherwise it would be kind of like watching a movie you don't know the ending of, only you can't actually see the movie, you're just being told what's going on in the movie, and the movie is actually your brother's crewmate and friend's life and you don't know how the movie ends and you can't even look it up, and this is a really long rambling analogy now.

What I'm trying to say is I'm very glad you're alive. It'll be good to see the Hermes from satellites instead of random campsites on Mars. And it'll be even better to see you in person.

Thanks for not losing your sense of humor, through all that. I can't tell you how many times Fundy yelled at me for all the giant dicks drawn in the Martian dirt, even though I'm not the one that was allowed to communicate with you and couldn't do anything about it. I thought it was bloody hilarious, though.

And thanks for surviving, because I didn't want to have to look at images of your dead body. I'm glad I wasn't able to see it all those months ago. I'm glad it's alive and walking and talking and surviving on planets and stuff.

Okay, that's probably enough. I just wanted to say good job. You were my whole job for like, a year and a half, and now I'm being promoted, so. Thanks for helping a guy out.

Very sincerely, Tommy Innit

(your personal SatCon)

Doctor Davidson,

For the purposes of this email, I'll keep it short. First off, congratulations on everything. You've done an incredible thing by simply surviving, and I applaud you for it.

I do have a few questions. Just, you know. Doing my job. What was it like? Your thought process, during an average day on Mars? Do you have anything you want the people of Earth to know? How are you adjusting to life back on Hermes ?

Take your time answering these questions. I just need to organize a press conference for later in the week to give an update on your status, and CNN is continuing its George Davidson Watch (a nightly segment), so we need to give them something new every day. Your cooperation is much appreciated.

I feel like I should reiterate I was completely against bullying you into answering personal questions, but as the director of media relations, I have a lot being thrown at me, and a lot of people want to know you. I understand you may not want to be known, so just make something up if you don't actually want to answer the questions.

Take care of yourself up there, George. Come back down safe. It'll be a media nightmare otherwise. (That is a joke.)

Fundy

Director of Media Relations

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

George,

Hey, man. Good going. I'm glad our MAV modifications didn't kill you.

Alright, we might've fucked up a little bit. I know you're probably pissed at JPL, just for all the shit we've made you do, but hey. It is what it is, and you're alive now.

I'm kidding. You're my friend, George. Your safety and survival has been the most important to us throughout all of this. And I'm glad you made it.

See you soon, buddy,

Alex Quackity

Director, Jet Propulsion Laboratory

Hey, George,

Glad you're alive. I'll be in further contact soon. Just wanted to let you know that I'm proud of all the things you've done. Thanks for letting us help you out. Thanks for surviving. Thanks for making all those giant dicks in the dirt, seriously, what the fuck, dude. You're making my life a living nightmare.

Kidding.

Wilbur Soot

Director of Mars Mission

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

GEORGE YOU MUFFIN,

GOD YOU DID IT! I am just so excited and so proud of you. You and the whole crew, really. You've done an incredible thing just by staying alive.

If you need anything, please, please let me know. We're getting you back in touch with your psychologist. In the meantime, our advice is- as far as we know, you were keeping video logs. Alyssa advises that you continue making voice memos/video logs as a method of coping. She thinks it'll be good for you, and the whole big team of psychologists we gathered just for you agree.

Stay safe up there, George.

Bad

Hermes Flight Director

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Dr. George Davidson,

Congratulations. I'm not sure if you've watched the video message sent to the crew, but I'm very proud of you and everything you've accomplished. You've done a wonderful thing. Thank you for surviving.

We have several departments here on Earth that are willing to offer you jobs, but I've told them that that's not something we need to worry about right now. What we need to worry about right now is your recovery, making sure you arrive home safe and sound. If you need anything at all, don't hesitate to let me know.

Again, good job on survival. It's not an easy thing.

Phil Watson

Director, National Aeronautics and Space Administration

George finishes the last email with a sigh. He's just now realizing he's got pretty much everyone at NASA at his beck and call- all he has to do is say a few words and they'll be tripping over themselves to help him.

He hates it.

He's just an astronaut, he didn't ask for any of this, he didn't ask to get left behind and survive. He can feel his rage building inside him, fury fueled by terror, and then he focuses instead on Dream's hand, still on his back.

He didn't survive for himself, or for any of the people down on Earth. He survived for his crew. He survived for this moment, right here, where everything is alright, for just a little while. He survived for Dream's hand on the small of his back, he survived for leaning back against Dream's chest and propping his feet up in Sapnap's lap, he survived for Techno perched on the edge of the couch and for Niki and Puffy leaning over each other at Puffy's console. He survived for these moments in the Rec, for those moments in the bridge, for knowing that the crew is and always will be here for him.

They're gathered. It's the usual team, waiting, quietly, in Phil's office.

"Niki's told him everything," Bad reports. "Pneumonia is currently the biggest concern. We've got him on a list for lung transplants, just in case, but we're not gonna know any of that until he's back on Earth. As long as he doesn't catch anything for a while, he should be okay."

"Good to hear," Phil says. "Fundy-"

"That'll be on the George Davidson Watch tonight," Fundy says with a nod. "I know it's something we could technically keep private, but the public very much wants to know his health condition."

"Maybe keep this one secret, then," Bad says, cringing. "We don't need to expose our every thought. Just say that based on preliminary checks, he's healthy, and there are no pressing

concerns.”

“Alright,” Fundy shrugs. “Whatever you say. Anything else I need to know?”

“No, you’re good, Fundy,” Phil says. Fundy nods and walks out of the room, and Phil swivels toward Quackity.

“What now,” Quackity says. “I swear to God, if you want me to build another probe in, what’s it gonna be this time, two weeks? A week and a half?” He’s clearly joking. Wilbur and Bad both laugh. Phil isn’t amused.

“No,” he says. “There’s currently an airlock on *Hermes* that only has one door. What are the chances of that door getting damaged?”

“Honestly?” Quackity shrugs. “Maybe twenty percent.”

“And that’s too high,” Bad says. “Is there anything the crew can do to reduce that chance?”

Quackity sighs. “I’ll come up with something,” he says. “Let me call Jack, get the rest of JPL on board, give me a day or two.”

“Given,” Phil says, spreading his arms. “Come up with a plan. Remember, just because George is back on the ship doesn’t mean we don’t have work to do. Two hundred and ten days to go.”

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

comments/kudos/subs/etc are always always always appreciated!

Helios

Chapter Notes

can i get a hell yeah for barely proofreading my shit

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Their schedules tell them to turn in at 22:00 central time, so that's what they do. Dream and George wander down toward the medbay together, and they part at the entrance wordlessly. When he's down the hall, Dream turns back and sees George still floating there, waiting. He waves, and George grins sheepishly. He waves back before floating down into the medbay.

Dream smiles to himself and makes his way to the rooms. Sapnap is outside his door, arms crossed.

"What are you doing?" Sapnap asks.

"I could ask you the same thing," Dream points out. "Do you need something?"

"I mean- why are you here and not with George?" Sapnap raises an eyebrow. Dream has a vague idea of what he's getting at, but isn't sure if his suspicions are correct.

"What are you talking about? It's sleepy time, dude."

"And you think George is gonna wanna wake up alone?"

"Niki's gonna be down there. She's sleeping in medbay with him to make sure nothing goes wrong and so he isn't alone."

Sapnap looks... displeased. Like he thinks it should be Dream staying with George. And yeah, sure, Dream would like that, but he doesn't want to be overstepping any boundaries.

"Alright," Sapnap says. "I'll take it. But you're gonna be down there first thing in the morning, right?"

“I mean, yes?” Dream says. “What’s got your knot in a twist? Why are you all over this all of a sudden?”

Sapnap frowns, like he’s debating saying something. Eventually, he decides to keep his mouth shut. Good, Dream thinks (lovingly, of course).

“Good night, Dream,” he says, and Dream rolls his eyes. Sapnap holds out a hand and pulls him into a hug after Dream takes it, and he lets himself rest there for a moment. “Have wonderful dreams of our darling Georgie.”

“Shut the hell up,” Dream says, and he grins as he pulls back and they slip into their respective rooms.

Dream does not have wonderful dreams about George. Dream has one hell of a nightmare about the launch failing. The MAV doesn’t even take off, the engines are bust; George remains trapped on Mars. There’s no way to get him food, so he’s going to slowly starve to death and there’s nothing that anyone can do about it.

It’s not even the crew’s fault, either, which is the worst part- the engines just don’t work. His dream-self could pin the fault on JPL, but he doesn’t care, he’s too busy mourning a man that isn’t even dead yet.

Dream wakes with a sour taste in his mouth and George’s name on his lips. He sits up in bed, hand clutching the sheets, and glances at the time. Just past three. He takes a few deep breaths, then pulls himself out of bed.

There’s no one in the hallway- as expected. He pads down softly, careful not to wake anyone up, and pulls himself up and into the main hallway. It doesn’t take him long to float down to the medbay entrance, and he rests there for a moment, debating whether he should go in or not.

Ultimately, he decides he should. His feet hit the ground a bit louder than he intended, and he stands still for a moment to make sure he didn’t wake anyone up.

Unfortunately, he did. Niki turns in one of the further beds, away from him. He didn’t wake her up. He did wake up George, who sits up and blinks one eye open, squinting through the dark.

“Dream?” he says, his voice coming out a soft whisper.

“Yeah,” Dream says, not moving from the entrance. “You good?”

“I was asleep,” George says accusingly. “Are *you* good?”

“Fine,” Dream says. “Bad dream.”

“Yeah?” George asks, pushing the blankets off of him and swinging his legs over the side of the bed. He pats the space next to him, and Dream makes his way over to sit down. George leans against him, wrapping their fingers together and resting his head on Dream’s shoulder. “What was it about?”

“The MAV’s engines failed during the launch,” Dream says. “And you were trapped. The dream was more about me mourning, though, which was the worst part, because I did. Mourn, I mean. In real life. But you’re here now, so it’s okay. I was just making sure it was a dream.”

“I’m glad you did,” George murmurs comfortingly. “I wasn’t having too great a dream, either.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“I don’t remember what it was about,” George hums. “But it wasn’t good. I felt... I dunno. Sad, I think.”

“Sad?”

“Melancholy, almost. Like something bad had happened, but there was nothing I could do about it, so I might as well move on.”

“Oh. That makes sense.” Dream isn’t sure if it does.

“Sure,” George laughs. “I dunno. I felt that a lot on Mars. Like... like things were inevitable, I guess. I’d inevitably run out of food. Something would inevitably break. I’d inevitably be rescued or die. And there wasn’t really anything I could do.”

“Of course there was,” Dream says, eyebrows furrowing. “You *colonized Mars*, George. You fixed everything that broke. And you did so, so much that got you to Schiaparelli so we could pick you up. You did all that yourself, George.”

“I had help,” George mutters, like this isn’t the way he wanted the conversation to be going. “NASA helped me out. You guys helped me out.”

“We just picked you up,” Dream points out.

“You did a lot for that, too,” George counters. “Five hundred and thirty-three more days in space. Risk upon risk. A mutiny. All for what, some dorky botanist?”

“Hey, hey, hey, you’re not just a dorky botanist,” Dream protests. “You’re also a dorky engineer.” George laughs, then brings one hand up to his ribs. He lowers it just as quickly, but Dream still catches the movement. “I’ll stop bothering you now. Let you get back to bed.”

“Sure,” George says. He makes no move to stop leaning on Dream. “If you want.”

“If I want?”

“I mean- I dunno. I’ve missed you. This is nice.”

“It is,” Dream agrees.

And if, twenty minutes later, George falls asleep on his shoulder, well- Dream certainly can’t move. Can’t risk waking him up. He needs his sleep. But after an hour of silently sitting, thinking about how glad he is he gets to have this moment, his arm starts falling asleep and his eyes start drooping, so he carefully reaches out and shifts George so he’s laying back in bed. He pulls the blankets up and George’s head shifts toward his hand, chasing his warmth, and Dream lets his hand rest on George’s cheek for just a moment.

He pulls back quickly when he realizes how affectionate the gesture seems, even with no one awake to witness it, and makes his way back to his bedroom.

He doesn't sleep the rest of the night.

George wakes up and he isn't sure if Dream coming to the medbay was something he imagined or not. Niki is bustling around, and she smiles at him when she sees he's awake.

"Hey," he says, his throat still heavy with that post-sleep feeling. "Night two."

"Yeah," Niki laughs. "Night two. How are you feeling?"

"Better," George agrees. "What's for breakfast, Doc?"

"Dried peaches," Niki tells him. "Delicious."

"Just for me, or is the whole crew getting peaches?" George asks.

"The whole crew gets to eat what they want," Niki reminds him. "You're the one who's malnourished."

"Right," George says with a nod. "Malnourished. Because of the fucking potatoes."

"I- no," Niki says, laughing and handing him a packet of food.

"What the fuck?" George says, opening it and peering inside. "Is this liquid?"

"Liquefied dried peaches," Niki amends. "Because the nutritionists and doctors at NASA think your stomach can't handle solid food."

“I have been eating *potatoes* for more than *three hundred days straight*, Niki,” George says, completely aghast and only faking it a little bit. “I think I can handle some dried peaches.”

“Sure,” Niki says. “And when you’re barfing your guts up in the bathroom later, you can come talk to me about how much you love solid food. You’ve still got acceleration sickness and I know that based on the way you keep wobbling around like a baby deer.”

And shit, she’s right. The edges of his vision are still blurry and he’s still a little nauseous, and he has no idea how long he’s going to remain that way. Maybe liquefied peaches are the best option at the moment.

He drinks without complaint. His stomach immediately protests, even though he was perfectly fine eating yesterday, and he nearly spits the third gulp back into the bag. Niki gives him a stern look, and he drinks his stupid fucking liquefied peaches slower.

Once she’s done her new morning daily checks or whatever it is the doctors at NASA have given them to work with, Niki declares that he’s good to go for the day. She purposefully leaves her computer on the login screen, probably to get him to record a video log or whatever it is Bad was telling him to do.

George sighs. It’s not a terrible idea.

He logs into the computer- *georgedavidson*, a very creative login, because he wasn’t really thinking when he made it, and *cat0812*, his cat’s name and then Dream’s birthday for the password, because he’s a simp.

The first thing that comes up are his options. He hovers over written log for a moment, just because he doesn’t want anyone to overhear him, and then switches to video log. He hits record without a second thought, and then he sits in Niki’s rolling chair for a moment, just staring at the screen.

“Um,” he says, and that blinking red light is boring into his soul. “Hi. The ‘mission day 751’ kind of threw me off for a minute, because I forgot we track time in mission days up here and not sols like we do on Mars.” He takes a deep breath and runs a hand through his hair. “But it doesn’t really matter what they track time in on Mars, because *I’m not fucking there anymore*.” He laughs, ignores the pain in his ribs, takes a deep breath. “I’m not fucking there!”

He laughs. Another deep breath while he tries to think of what to say.

“Hello, mission day 751! God bless you, mission day, and not sols. Fuck sols. Fuck the sun. Fuck-fuck Apollo, fuck the sun god. Apollo isn’t even the fucking sun god, he’s healing and music and archery and shit. Helios is- okay, Helios is the sun *titan*, but same difference. Helios deserves the title more than Apollo, cocky bastard.

“I dunno. I feel like I revert to talking about Greek mythology when I don’t know what to talk about. NASA’s engrained it into me- *Hermes*, Ares, fuckin’ - I don’t even know. I don’t even know! But I’m not on Mars anymore, so none of it matters!

“Okay, a fair amount of stuff matters. I’ve got to make sure I’m not zoning out too much, because I don’t want to worry the crew. I need to be breathing deeply, or else I’m at risk for pneumonia, and if I catch pneumonia I could need a lung transplant, or something, and I don’t really want a lung transplant. You know?

“Anyways. I’m on *Hermes*, in case you couldn’t tell. Currently in medbay. Niki’s left me for the moment. I think she’s been saying that I’m not supposed to be left alone, but then she left me alone, probably so I can record this video log. Because of my mental health. Or something.

“So here I am! The launch was successful. I’m alive. The crew’s alive. We’ll be back on Earth in two hundred and nine days, if everything goes right. Which. Knock on wood. There’s nothing wood here, because space and flammables don’t go well together. But in my mind I’m knocking on wood.

“Speaking of my mind. Supposedly video logs are my way of coping now, or something, because they’re having me do this still. And I’ve noticed that my mental health is kind of fucked up, honestly- I keep zoning out, thinking things to myself, because I’m so used to not having anyone around to talk to.

“And I haven’t told the crew this, but I’m constantly terrified. I’m terrified that something’s going to go wrong, because of course something’s going to go wrong. Alyssa and Dream and every shrink on the globe would probably say that’s anxiety, and they’d probably be right, but I don’t like it. I’m used to it, but I don’t like it.

“It’s this- this unholy terror, about everything, constantly. Every possibility is running through my mind, along with every solution, and it’s- it’s a lot. That’s probably something I should talk to Alyssa about, honestly. She’d probably have a really smart solution.

“So, yeah. Mission day 751. I think that’s a pretty solid first video log in mission day time. Fuck you, Mars time. I never have to deal with you again.”

He presses the stop button and takes a few deep breaths to calm his racing heart. He doesn’t even know why he’s so nervous- he’s done this literally hundreds of times. Maybe it’s the idea that the crew is down the hall, elsewhere on the ship; maybe it’s the idea that he isn’t alone anymore.

He isn’t alone anymore. And isn’t *that* something to wrap his head around. If he needs anything, from any of them, he just needs to float down the hall. That’s... that’s certainly something.

And, since he can float down the hall and be with people, that’s what he does.

“And we’re back with CNN’s George Davidson Watch, joined today by Director Fundy of Media Relations at NASA. Hi, Fundy, what’s the status report?”

“As reported by Doctor Nihachu, George is in good health. He’s still getting over the acceleration sickness, but he’s expected to make a full recovery.”

“That’s great to hear. Any updates on the rest of the crew?”

“All at full health as well. There were no complications during the rescue that we know of at the time being. The *Hermes* is also completely en route for a mission end date at the predicted time.”

“And what about the airlock door that was blown during the pick-up?”

“Perfectly fine at this time. The Jet Propulsion Lab is currently working on solutions should anything go wrong.”

“Any news on anything that could be recovered from the Ares III or IV mission sites?”

“Nothing that we know of.”

“Alright. Thank you so much, Fundy. There are still two hundred and nine days to go until the Ares III crew is back on Earth, and we’ll be here reporting on all of them.”

“Cut to commercial!” someone yells, and Fundy sags in his seat. He’s tired of media appearances. No offense to George or anything, but he can’t wait for the hype to die down. Which it isn’t going to do until at *least* after whatever the investigation committee comes up with is over.

“Thanks again, Fundy,” the CNN reporter says. He should probably know the names of all these reporters by now, but every one just slips out of his head and is immediately replaced by hundreds of others.

“Not a problem,” Fundy says, getting up and making his way off the set. His phone starts ringing almost instantly. He pulls it out of his jacket pocket- Wilbur. Fucking hell.

“Really?” is the first thing Wilbur says, his tone incredulous.

“Really what?” Fundy asks. “You’re going to have to be specific.”

“‘No complications that we know of at this time.’ ‘Perfectly fine at this time.’ ‘Nothing that we know of.’ What the hell, Fundy?”

“I’m the media expert, Wilbur,” Fundy snorts. “That’s how I’m trained to handle situations. The blame can’t be thrown on us if something goes wrong. You saw they asked about the mission sites?”

“I did. We’re gonna have to do something about that now, aren’t we?” Wilbur’s tone is teasing. Fundy isn’t amused. He starts making his way out of the building, down to his car so he can drive back to headquarters in time for whatever other crisis happens today.

“You weren’t before?”

“I mean-”

“Wilbur,” Fundy says. “You’ve got your funding for Ares 6, right?”

“Right.”

“What about seven? Eight? You want public interest, Congress funding for more Mars missions since we had to scrap three and four?”

“Fundy-”

“George’s video logs. We need them, Wilbur.”

“We can’t release that to the public, are you kidding me? You know George-”

“I *know* that we’re a government-run organization and we need government funding. George’s video logs- showing hope, courage, the drive to survive- that’s how we get that.”

“We’re not talking about this right now, Fundy.”

“So there is a way to recover them.”

“I- yes there’s a way to recover them, of course there’s a *way*, ” Bad’s voice interrupts. Fundy’s at his car now; he enters quickly and switches the phone speaker to his car speaker.

“Have I been on speakerphone this whole time?” Fundy asks.

“Yes,” Phil’s voice answers.

“Just because there’s a way doesn’t mean that we’re *going* to, because the second we do that’s on the public record! Do you know what that could do to George’s mental health, having to relive that?” Bad demands.

“No, Fundy’s right,” Wilbur says. “Think of the funding-”

“Think of *George*, ” Bad snaps. Fundy’s got the car up and running, and he starts the drive while Wilbur and Bad continue to bicker.

“Guys,” Phil says, nearly five minutes later. “I’m going to send an email about the fact that they’re technically private astronaut logs, so they should be able to stay private if we recover them. At least for long enough that George himself can make a decision about how he exposes himself to that. Once we know, then we’ll choose whether or not to go about the process of recovering them.”

“Perfect, agreement made,” Fundy says loudly, before either Wilbur or Bad can argue. The idea of releasing the video logs is a press nightmare, but Fundy works for a company. Fuck capitalism, and all that, but they need money to keep doing what they do, and Fundy would really like to be kept in a job. He does care about George, but he also cares about NASA.

Wilbur hangs up the phone shortly after that, and Fundy spends the rest of the ride in silence. Well, not complete silence- he’s fielding calls left and right, trying to send them off to other media representatives while he’s driving. He flashes his ID card to the security guard at the gate and parks in his designated spot, then practically runs up to Phil’s office.

They’re all still there, thankfully, standing like they were waiting for him. Wilbur and Bad are both sitting facing opposite directions. Phil is typing away on his computer.

“Email sent,” he says, looking up and noticing that Fundy’s entered, out of breath. “Did you run, mate?”

“Yes,” Fundy answers. “Because I assumed there would be a change within the twenty minutes it took me to get here from the CNN studio.”

“There wasn’t,” Phil says. *Wonderful*, Fundy thinks. “Just more arguing on whether or not the video logs are something we should release to the public.”

“They are,” Fundy and Wilbur say at the same time.

“They aren’t,” Bad counters. “I feel like this isn’t your choice to make. It’s George’s.”

“He might not have a choice,” Wilbur points out. “There’s always the possibility that the investigations committee subpoenas the logs-”

“I’m not sure that’s what subpoena means-” Bad mutters.

“Either way,” Wilbur says loudly. “It might not end up being our choice.”

A day later finds them meeting in the same room, this time with Quackity joining them. He’s just flown in from Pasadena, fresh off the plane, and he’s got a briefcase full of papers with him that he dumps unceremoniously onto Phil’s desk.

“I try to keep this office neat, Quackity,” Phil says tiredly.

“Well, you’re not going to like what I’m about to say,” Quackity says.

“That has nothing to do with keeping my office neat.”

“I didn’t ask for your opinion.”

“Oh my God,” Fundy says. It’s like he isn’t even media relations, it’s like he’s a fucking handler. He’s no better than a babysitter for some of the smartest scientists in the world. It’s a wonder he hasn’t had to clean up more of their messes yet.

“Just rip the bandaid off, Quackity,” Wilbur says.

“Do you remember what I told you the last time you said that to me?” Quackity says sharply. “It was about the MAV modifications, and you told me to put the bandaid back on. I had some of my best guys working on this project, round the clock, and we’ve got fifty hundred other things going on, you’re *already* having us prep for Ares 6, and-”

“Alex,” Phil says sharply. “What did you find?”

“There’s a lot that could go wrong,” Quackity says. “Most of it is already a risk- the door could breach, there could be mechanical failure, the chances of those are all very small. Same risk factor as when *Hermes* was first launched. What we are worried about is the fact that the bomb was hooked up to one of the lighting panels so that the crew could remotely detonate it.”

“Why is that important?” Fundy asks. He’s not a fucking doctor, he’s got a bachelor’s degree in journalism and a master’s in communications, he doesn’t know all their fancy science terms no matter how much he’s picked up over the years. Which is a fair amount. He can work the technology if it’s put in front of him, but that’s just because he moonlighted as a hacker in high school. When they start talking tech, he usually starts zoning out and worrying about the next day’s conferences and interviews.

“If anything goes wrong with that panel, there’s a chance the whole thing could blow again,” Quackity says. “And the same goes for every other malfunction that occurred. The crew hasn’t been fixing stuff up yet because they’ve got one systems operator and one engineer, and the engineer is currently on glorified bedrest. Until things get fixed, they’re all at risk for being sucked out into the vacuum of space.”

“Oh, awesome,” Fundy says. That would be a press nightmare. “How do they fix it?”

“Right now? They get George to tell them what to do. We can send instructions up, but we’d have to get in contact with them first and figure out what each specific malfunction is. If one thing goes wrong while they’re fixing something they don’t understand, we’re at risk for the whole thing blowing.”

“Sounds cheery,” Wilbur scoffs. “Have you gotten in contact with them yet?”

“We have. Ideally, it’ll all be fixed within a week. But that means there’s still a week for things to go wrong.”

“You said before there was around a twenty percent chance,” Phil interrupts. “If everything gets fixed properly, what will the chances be?”

“About the same for an outer airlock door randomly defuncting on any other regulation-built

ship,” Quackity responds. “Maybe point-oh-three, point-oh-four percent. Not likely. Only we don’t have a safety in case this one blows.”

“Perfect,” Bad says sarcastically. “No way this can go wrong.”

“And what are their chances of accidentally blowing the door?” Phil asks, frowning at Bad.

“I had eight separate engineers run the numbers, but you understand we don’t have a set way of measuring the crew’s technical skills,” Quackity says, running a hand through his hair.

“Spit the number out, Quackity,” Wilbur orders.

“On average, around thirty percent.”

“Mission day 753. The crew has currently all abandoned me and are working on fixing things down by the airlock they blew during my rescue. They are *fixing things*. Like *engineers*. That is *my job*, and I’m not even allowed to be doing it because I’m on ‘bedrest’ or whatever the hell Niki said.”

He puts air quotes around the word ‘bedrest’ and swivels around in the chair a few times. He’s bored. He’s terribly, utterly bored. He never thought he would miss the high-stakes thrill of Mars, but it’s been four days and he misses the high-stakes thrill of Mars.

He says this out loud to the video log. The George on the screen stares back at him and looks horrifying. It’s not even like he’s feeling better, he has no reason to be bored- the edges of his vision are *still* blurry and he still could barely keep his breakfast down this morning. Niki says it’s because he went through twelve g’s of pressure and the normal human can only take about nine. Which, yeah, good on him, but he’s tired of feeling like he’s about to lose his guts.

He also says this to the video log.

“Which, I’m just saying, motion sickness in space usually only lasts, like, three days. And it’s been four. It’s probably because of the twelve g’s, or something. I dunno. Half the time I zone out when

Niki's talking to me because I'm still not used to having people around.

"Speaking of. The crew has been ordered that the only time they're allowed to leave me alone is when I'm recording the video logs. So I need a twenty-four hour babysitter, which, alright. I like the crew. I like having people around. But they can't trust me to not be breathing deeply or something, and I really, really don't want a lung transplant, so I think I can handle this on my own. That doesn't stop Techno from yelling at me every couple of breaths, though.

"Sapnap's my current babysitter, and he's getting us lunch, or something. We're going to see if I can hold my food down. I haven't lost it yet! Oh, and- here he comes."

George stops the video log as Sapnap's feet hit the ground of the medbay.

"You done?" he asks, making his way over with a bag of food. "You get solids today."

"Is that a good idea?" George asks, raising an eyebrow. Sapnap shrugs.

"I'm not a doctor," he replies, taking a bite out of his own food.

"I am, and I don't think it's a good idea," George says, but he eats his dried plums anyways.

He manages to keep them down, thankfully, and Sapnap reads him the problems from the airlock hall along with JPL's proposed solutions. Half of them make George cringe, just because NASA has a very particular way of going about doing things that he is very unused as a result of, you know, being alone on Mars for a year and a half. The other half seem alright- George asks for the names of people who came up with some of the fixes, and Sapnap types away at the computer for a few minutes before he replies.

"The lighting panel fix is thanks to Hannah Rose and Noah Foolish under the supervision of Jack Manifold," Sapnap tells him. "You know any of them?"

George shrugs. "I think Wilbur mentioned a Jack at JPL once or twice, maybe. Can you send a message to him saying to tell those three I approve of them and no one else?"

“Sure thing,” Sapnap snorts, grinning. “Message.... sent.”

“Perfect, thank you. Did you hear my wonderful video log?”

“Only the tail end of it. You holding your food okay?”

“As well as I can. I’m pretty sure I’ve taken more g’s than you.”

“Yeah, but I’ve taken more d’s.”

“Literally shut the fuck up.”

Sapnap practically cackles, and George rolls his eyes. God, he’s missed this. He sits in his bed for a bit and considers taking a nap, just to annoy Sapnap, but they end up going on a trip around the ship instead, with Sapnap keeping a close eye on his breathing. When they pass by the airlock, they both stop for a minute to watch the rest of the crew working.

Techno and Dream have a pile of tools at their feet, staring at a panel on the wall. Niki’s got three different parts of the lighting panel in her hands, and Puffy’s carefully maneuvering a wire around. George wants to get closer, to help, to see exactly what it is they’re all doing, but Sapnap tugs on his elbow. Before they can float off, Dream glances up.

“Hey, George!” he calls, waving a tool in the air and nearly hitting Techno in the head.

“Stop simping and pay attention to what you’re doing,” Techno replies scorchingly, teasingly, loud enough for them all to hear. Niki and Puffy both laugh, neither of them breaking their concentration. Sapnap practically howls as he drags George off.

They finish their lap around the ship and get back to medbay. He considers kicking Sapnap out and making another video log, just for a few seconds of privacy, mostly because he has no damn idea how to interact with anyone.

Which, as Alyssa says, is an issue. He got his first email from her yesterday, meaning he now has a therapist again. And God, does he need one. He keeps falling into awkward silences with the crew,

he startles at loud noises just because it sends every emergency scenario running through his mind, and even recording the video logs alone makes him anxious after a while, even if he enjoys the privacy at first.

Thank God the crew is understanding. They don't say anything when he gets lost in his own head or when he starts talking to himself (the first one has happened too many times to count over the past four days, the latter only a couple times, thankfully). They don't laugh at him when he jumps and most importantly, they're *kind*. They're understanding about him wanting physical contact and triple-checking the systems before they turn in for the night.

Alyssa says that last one isn't healthy. It's a *behavior*, she says, and not the good kind. *It saved my life*, George wrote back. *That doesn't mean you need to triple-check that the coffee maker is plugged in*, Alyssa replied.

Maybe he should send her another email. He notices Sapnap watching him with a soft smile and offers a sheepish grin in response. He opens his mouth to say something-

-and that's when the alarm starts blaring.

Chapter End Notes

...sorry?

[twitter](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated!!!

Crius

Chapter Notes

if my space knowledge is incorrect please forgive me. i did research though

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Oh fuck,” is the first thing that comes out of Sapnap’s mouth. He turns to George, expecting his best friend’s face to be full of fear, but no. There’s a determined sort of resolution there, like he was expecting this to happen and now it finally has.

Four days. They were given four days of peace before things went wrong.

“Stay here,” Sapnap says, his mind racing. Their number one concern is keeping George safe. They went through all of this for him, and if something were to happen now, Sapnap would never forgive himself. George needs to stay safe. George himself immediately protests this.

“I’m literally an engineer, Sapnap,” he says. “Whatever it is, I can help-”

“We don’t know what it is yet,” Sapnap says, probably a little too harshly. “Stay here. I’ll go check it out.”

Without waiting for further protests, and knowing that George will probably follow him anyways, Sapnap quickly makes his way out of the medbay and into the main hallway. He floats down toward the airlock where the repairs were being done- Airlock 1- only for Dream and Niki to both go flying past him.

“Reactor!” Dream says in lieu of explanation.

“George!” Niki replies. They’re shouting at each other, like it’s instructions, like there was a plan. Techno is behind them, going for the controls room, and Sapnap follows him.

“What’s going on?” he demands. “Where’s Puffy?”

“Making sure nothing else goes wrong in the airlock,” Techno says gruffly. “We’re not sure what the issue is, the alarms just started going off, start looking around-”

It’s hard to think with the alarm- it’s a piercing sound, a warning, and Sapnap tries to tune it out as finds the tools he needs to run diagnostics on the controls. He pulls a diagram of the outer ship up quickly. Finding out if there’s a hole in the ship itself is the main concern with everything going on, although if there was, they’d probably already be dead.

“It’s not a hull breach,” he reports. “So we’re not- oh, no, we are in imminent danger of that, apparently.” Which is, really, not that great. At least there isn’t already one.

“What’s the issue?” Techno asks, leaning over the back of his chair. Sapnap pulls up the barometric diagram of the ship and points out the damaged airlock.

“There’s too much pressure in the airlock,” he says. “Someone must’ve pulled something, a repair gone wrong, I’m not sure exactly what. But if we don’t lessen the pressure in there, it’ll blow the door off and kill us all.”

“Jesus Christ,” Techno mutters. “How long do we have before it blows?”

“Forty minutes to an hour, maybe, based on the rate the pressure is increasing. I don’t know exactly.”

“Send a message to NASA. JPL- Quackity. That’s enough time for us to get a response.”

“Will do.”

Techno pulls down the comm system for the whole ship, and Sapnap hurriedly types out an email to Quackity, Wilbur, Bad, and Phil, pretty much repeating the words Techno is saying. “Guys, we’ve got about forty minutes until the pressure in the airlock hits the point where it’ll blow the door. Currently working on a solution. Wherever you are, please get on headset, *now*. ”

Sapnap sends the email and slams his headset on over his ears. Niki bursts into the room moments later.

“Is George-” Sapnap starts.

“He’s fine, he’s instructing us from down there,” she says, putting on her own headset. “Niki on.”

“Dream’s on.”

“Puffy’s on.”

“George on. What’s the issue stemming from, Techno?”

“We’re not sure, we can’t tell from the controls room. Puffy?”

“My best guess is that something got tripped during repairs that’s leaking air in at a slow enough rate that it’s causing the pressure to increase in the general area. I can’t tell what it is exactly.”

“You’ve gotta let me take a look,” George says immediately. “This is what I *do* -”

“You can instruct us on the engineering aspect from medbay, George,” Niki says pointedly.

“No, I mean handle emergency situations, I can *help* -”

“George, stay put, that’s an order,” Techno says. George goes silent. “Dream, how’s the reactor?”

“It’s stable,” Dream replies, sounding worried. Sapnap isn’t sure if it’s for George or for them. “Not sure how long that’ll last if the ship’s depressurizing.”

“Opposite of depressurizing,” Sapnap corrects. “Too much pressure. We need to find a way to stabilize Airlock 1 and then fix whatever the problem is.”

“Why don’t we do what we did to decelerate during the rescue?” Techno asks. “Complete refresh of the pressure on the ship, after we fix the issue?”

“We don’t have enough fuel for that,” Sapnap says, shaking his head. “We slow down that much, we’ll never make it home.”

“The ship can live with a little bit of pressure in one area, we can work on that problem later,” Puffy says tersely. “We need to fix whatever’s letting the pressure in, and we need to do it *now* .”

“Okay,” Techno says. Sapnap turns and can practically see the Commander’s mind whirring. He and Niki exchange a look. “Puffy and Dream, EVA up. George, get up to controls.”

“What-” Sapnap starts. Techno pulls the headset off.

“We can seal off the bridge so that if something goes wrong, whoever’s up here gets out through the escape pod,” Techno says. “You and Niki stay here. Keep George up here once he gets here. I’m going to suit up and help them down there.”

“So you’re saying if something goes wrong, you want half of us to eject and abandon the other half on the ship?” Sapnap demands.

“If I order you to do it, I expect you to do it, Sapnap,” Techno says, and he’s got that manic look in his eyes that he gets sometimes when he’s really serious about something. It’s the look he had when he told them if the *Taiyang Shen* hook-up didn’t work, Niki would be the one to survive. It’s the look he had when he and Dream were screaming at each other about going untethered if needed. It’s the look he has now. Sapnap swallows harshly.

“Okay,” he says eventually. “Okay, fine, but only as a last resort.” Only because it’ll save George and Niki. Only because he, as Techno’s second-in-command, has a duty to get as many of them home as possible.

“Good,” Techno says, and he makes his way out of the room. Sapnap turns back to Niki, whose eyes are wide. She shakes her head. Sapnap holds out a hand, and she takes it and squeezes quickly, letting go just as fast.

George makes his way up moments later, glances around, and then takes his usual seat. It’s good to see him sitting there, Sapnap thinks, even in these circumstances.

“Hey,” he says as he slips his headset on. “Do we know what the problem is?”

“Not yet,” Sapnap responds, tuning back in on the headset. Dream, Techno, and Puffy all have their comms in by now, so he gestures to Niki and George to switch to that channel, then does the same on his own headset.

“Okay,” Techno says. “We’re making our way to the airlock. Sap, are you broadcasting to NASA?”

“No, but we can start,” Sapnap says, fiddling with the controls. He glances at Niki, who nods. She presses a few buttons, then gives the thumbs-up. “We’re live.”

“Alright. This is Commander Technoblade of the Ares III crew, currently aboard *Hermes* space shuttle.” He’s talking directly to NASA and anyone else watching, letting them know what’s going on. “Around 4:43 PM on Mission Day 753 an alarm alerted us to an increase in pressure in the airlock we blew during Doctor George Davidson’s rescue. We’re currently attempting to find where the increase in pressure is coming from before we worry about depressurizing the ship.”

“The increase in pressure isn’t affecting navigation at all,” Sapnap reports, for the benefit of anyone listening, crew and NASA alike. “Still on course, both time-wise and route-wise.”

“If you just let me out there-” George mutters, not on headset, just to Sapnap and Niki.

“No,” they both hiss at the same time.

“Captain C. Puffy currently looking at Lighting Panel 41,” Puffy reports. “Dr. Nihachu and I were working on it when the alarm went off. No visible issues. Niki, can you run diagnostics?”

“Running,” Niki says.

“Dream currently checking EMU power controls,” Dream says. “Which the Commander and I were working on before the alarm. No visible issues here, either.”

“Nothing on our end for Lighting Panel 41,” Niki reports. “Checking EMU power source now.”

There's a few moments of tense silence as Niki types. Sapnap can see George fidgeting in his seat out of the corner of his eye. He knows his friend is itching to get out there, but they can't risk it, not with his ribs. Niki talked to the whole crew about the dangers involved with health complications, and they're going to do their best to not let that happen to one of their own.

"There's nothing wrong with the EMU," Niki says. "Running internal checks on the avionics panel, I'm getting something there, I think."

"Keep us updated," Techno says. Another few moments of silence. Sapnap keeps an eye on the barometric diagram. The pressure is still increasing at a slow but steady rate.

"Nothing in avionics," Niki says. "Checking the door itself now. You see anything down there?"

"Nothing wrong with the door that's visible," Puffy replies. "Dream?"

"Nothing I can see," Dream reports. "I don't think it's the door, Niki, we would've been able to see--"

"Got it!" Niki cries. "There's an issue with the door but it's not visible, it's the thermal protection system- there's a hole somewhere."

"Shit," Techno mutters. *Shit*, Sapnap thinks.

"I know how to fix that," George says quickly. "Let me down there--"

"No," Techno says immediately. "Sapnap, have you gotten a response from NASA yet?"

"Nothing," Sapnap says, checking quickly. "You have a plan?"

"I have a plan, but no one's going to like it," Techno says. "Dream, Puffy, with me. We're going to Airlock 2. Sapnap, when I tell you to, I want you to close off every main hatch, then open the outer Airlock 1 door."

“What?” Sapnap says. “Are you kidding me? That’ll launch us back, we don’t have excess fuel to get home, Techno.”

“So turn the ship around,” Techno says. “You can do that, right?”

“If I turn the engines I can spin us around a hundred and eighty degrees, yeah,” Sapnap says. “So you want me to shoot us forward instead?”

“We can worry about the course later,” Techno orders. “We’re going to make sure we don’t blow ourselves into space now. George, would the door be easier to fix if it was open or closed?”

“Closed,” George says instantly. “And if you let me-”

“From the inside or outside?”

“I’d have to take a look.”

“Niki, show him what you’ve got.”

George huffs and makes his way over to Niki. Sapnap turns back to the controls and starts turning the ship a hundred and eighty degrees. The engines fight against him, not really supposed to turn in that direction, but they’re halfway there by the time George comes up with an answer.

“Outside,” he says. “The issue’s on the outside.”

“It’s increasing steadily, Commander,” Sapnap says, checking the barometrics again. “The pressure, I mean. What’s your plan here?”

“Once the ship is fully depressurized, I want you to close the airlock door,” Techno says, keeping his voice calm, controlled. “Puffy’s going to make her way along the outside of the ship. I’m going to have the tether, Dream is our back-up if she needs another set of hands. Then George is going to instruct us on how to fix it.”

“Alright,” George mutters. “Alright.”

“We’re all set in here, Commander,” Sapnap says.

“We’re in Airlock 2,” Techno says. “Opening inner doors.”

An alert, saying that the inner doors have been opened, then another alert saying they’ve closed.

“Dream, Puffy, buckle up,” Techno orders. “Sapnap, close all hatches. Every single one.”

“Closing,” Sapnap says. He checks their course- the engines and the ship have turned a complete 180. “This’ll release pressure from the bridge only, but it’s going to be bumpy for about three seconds.”

“Then hold on tight,” Techno says. “We’re ready when you are.”

“Is this the best place for George to be?” Sapnap asks, turning to Niki.

“George is right here,” George mutters.

“Yes,” Niki says. “George, I need you to buckle up and take very deep breaths, okay? Don’t breathe when the acceleration starts, then go back to breathing right after.”

“Got it,” George says. Niki checks to make sure he and Sapnap are both actually secure before securing herself, and Sapnap turns back to his flight controls.

“Ready,” he says. “Houston, be advised, we are *once again* deliberately letting the space get inside here. Repeat, Houston, be advised, we are deliberately opening the outer door in Airlock 1 and allowing the ship to depressurize. On your word, Commander.”

“Go, Sapnap.”

“Airlock 1 outer door opening in three-”

“They’re *what* ?” Wilbur yells.

“Checking on a possible hull breach,” Quackity says, scrolling through the email as they run down to Mission Control. “Bad and Phil are already there, they’re waiting on a possible broadcast or any other form of communication, Fundy’s talking to the press right now-”

“How the hell did the press get word of this already?” Wilbur demands.

“Fundy told them,” Quackity says. “Because of our whole ‘transparency’ thing or whatever. And the public interest in literally everything that goes on on *Hermes*. And this is a pretty big thing.”

“Yes, I know it’s a pretty big thing,” Wilbur hisses. They burst into Mission Control to see Bad on headset, pacing back and forth. Punz is at the controls, typing furiously, and Phil beckons them further in when he sees them enter.

“This is Commander Technoblade of the Ares III crew, currently aboard *Hermes* space shuttle. Around 4:43 PM on Mission Day 753 an alarm alerted us to an increase in pressure in the airlock we blew during Doctor George Davidson’s rescue. We’re currently attempting to find where the increase in pressure is coming from before we worry about depressurizing the ship.”

Techno’s voice blares throughout Mission Control, sending the room practically into a panic. The rest of the crew talks periodically as Wilbur, Quackity, Phil, and Bad all circle up.

“Okay,” Wilbur says. “We’ve all read the email. What can we do?”

“Nothing,” Bad says. “Literally nothing. Once again, we’re helpless.”

“We could send them a plan, or something,” Quackity says. “But I reckon they’ve got about forty minutes before the pressure is so great that the hull blows.”

“Awesome,” Wilbur says. “Epic. So they’re on their own, again.”

“Right,” Phil says. “But they’re smart. They’ll figure it out. George is an ace at handling emergency situations, and the rest of the crew is there for a reason.”

“Wilbur,” Bad says, looking directly at him. “I think now would be a good time to pray to those gods again.”

“Oh great Crius, god of constellations,” Wilbur mutters, somewhat sarcastically, but he takes a glance upward. The stars are the only things that can help them now.

“Two-”

“No,” Wilbur says into the phone. “We don’t really know what’s happening-”

“I’m on my way, and you’d better not hang up the phone,” Karl responds. There’s the sound of a car door slamming, then an engine starting. “If my husband is about to die-”

“There’s nothing we can do, Karl,” Wilbur says, trying to keep his voice calm. “I have to alert the other families-”

“Fine!” Karl practically shrieks. “That’s fine! Tell your security guard to let me in because I’m not stopping-”

And with that, he hangs up. Wilbur takes a deep breath and dials the number for George’s parents. He turns back as something slams against the wall and sees Tommy bursting through the door, phone in hand. He’s got Tubbo and Ranboo both in tow, along with a girl Wilbur recognizes but whose name he can’t place. Phil looks up from where he’s been attempting to reach Puffy’s brother. He shakes his head at the younger four and gives Wilbur a look.

“Hi, Mrs. Davidson?” Wilbur says as the phone is picked up. “Yeah, we’ve got a situation down here- no no, it’s nothing horrible, just routine checks that revealed some- yes, I’ll keep you updated- yes, George is fine- sorry?”

He hates this. He hates this so much. He turns to the girl that Tommy dragged in with him and says, “Sorry, are you Drista?”

“Yeah,” the girl says haughtily. “What about it?”

“George’s mother is asking to speak with you.” God knows why. Drista- Dream’s younger sister, Wilbur remembers her now- steps forward and takes his phone out of his hand without asking.

Wilbur sighs. “I’m gonna need that back,” he mutters, then wanders his way over to Phil. Phil brushes past him immediately, going for Tubbo.

“Can you get ahold of your brother?” he asks. “He’s Captain Puffy’s emergency contact-”

“Half-brother,” Tubbo corrects instantly. “And probably not.”

“Great,” Phil says, throwing his hands up in the air. “That’s that, then, mate, let’s-”

“Two-”

“One. We are go for airlock opening.”

Sapnap hits the button. The whole ship lurches forward, ten different alarms start going off, and after three seconds, just as the lurch is dying down, Sapnap closes the door. *Hermes* continues coasting forward at a much faster pace, and Techno’s voice comes in over the comms, but it’s faint, like he’s yelling from a distance. Sapnap rolls his neck and cracks his jaw a few times, trying to pop his ears.

He turns back to see George unbuckling, then doubling over, clutching his ribs. He's on the ground and Sapnap feels a flash of fear, and Niki lunges forward on her knees, trying to get him to sit upright.

"...re you okay?" Techno's voice yells in Sapnap's ears. "Sapnap! Nihachu! Davidson! Report!"

"We're fine," Sapnap says. "Sorry, George's- something's up with George's ribs, he's okay, though, he's waving Niki off-"

"Going off headset!" Niki snaps, yanking the headphones off her head, then pulling George's off as well.

"Okay," Techno says. "We're all fine here. Is George going to be okay to direct Puffy?"

"One sec," Sapnap says, muting his microphone. He turns back. "George, are you good to direct?"

"I'm fine," George gasps out, both hands still on his ribcage. "I'm fine, Niki, put my headset back on-"

Niki cusses at him for a few moments. Sapnap waits until she's done, then unmutes his mic.

"Yeah," he says. "We're all good here."

"Good," Techno says. "We're depressurized in here- open the outer airlock door."

"Opening," Sapnap says, hitting the switch. The alarms have all died down, and the barometric diagram is showing that the busted airlock has been depressurized- or at least, is at the same pressure as the rest of the bridge, which at the moment is not suitable for human life. Sapnap hits another few buttons, starting the process of re-pressurizing the ship.

"Puffy tethered," Techno says. "She's heading out now."

“How’s our course, Sapnap?” Dream asks.

“Shit,” Sapnap says with a slight laugh as he looks at the navigation tab. “We’re going to have to find some way to slow down or else we’re in for another gravitationally-assisted loop around Earth.”

“Worry about that later,” Techno orders. “Fix the ship now.”

“Right,” Sapnap says. “George-”

“George back on headset,” George says, glaring at Niki. Niki glares right back as she shoves her own headset on. “Puffy, where are you at?”

“Approaching the outer door now,” Puffy reports. “It looks like something on one of the inner edges is busted up, George. A tiny little slit that might be letting in some of that good old space air.”

“That’ll be the HRSI plates,” George confirms. “They’re meant to withstand 1,260 degrees Celsius, but the explosion must’ve generated a lot more than that. It probably burned off some of the outer edges, which means we need to replace the plate. Sapnap, open the door.”

“I’m pressurizing the ship,” Sapnap tells him.

“Well, stop pressurizing the ship,” George snaps. Sapnap stops pressurizing the ship. “Puffy, move out of the way. Sapnap’s opening the door.”

“Is this safe?” Puffy asks nervously.

“Pressurization hadn’t started, it was warming up,” Sapnap reports. “It’ll be fine.”

“Sure,” Puffy says. Sapnap opens the door. They all wait a breath, and nothing happens. “Okay. I see it, George. Can we wedge the door half-open?”

“Yeah,” Sapnap says, typing furiously. “I’d have to- I do not know how to do this. I’m not qualified to do this. Niki, come override this code.”

“I don’t know how to override code, that’s Puffy’s job,” Niki protests.

“Oh my God, I’ll instruct you,” Puffy says. She tells him what he needs to type in, and he follows her instructions. “Perfect!” she cries a few moments after he implements them. “Okay, George. What now?”

“Get Dream to bring you whatever you need to get the plate off. I’m going to go down and get a new plate, we have some on board-”

“Absolutely not,” Niki says. “You’re not going anywhere.”

“Yeah, because the bridge is currently open, so you literally can’t go anywhere,” Sapnap points out. Niki and George do not laugh. He doesn’t blame them.

“Fine,” George says. “Dream, go down to storage, get a spare HRSI plate, then get out to Puffy. You can probably go through the bridge instead of the outside of the ship.”

“On it,” Dream says. It takes a few minutes of silence, George’s rage palpable in the air, before Dream reports that he’s got the needed materials and Puffy reports that Dream’s coming her way.

“Okay,” George says. “Be very, very careful when you remove the plate. You’re going to have to take it out from between the other layers of the ship. Don’t just throw it off into space, keep it in the ship.”

“Got it,” Puffy says. “So we’re taking the ship apart.”

“No,” George says. “No, you’re not, do not do that-”

“I was joking,” Puffy says. “We’re only sort-of taking the ship apart.”

“Sure,” George replies, and Sapnap can feel how tense he is from across the room. “You’re sort-of taking the ship apart. Just- be careful, yeah?”

“Being careful,” Dream echoes. “Don’t worry, Georgie.”

“I’m worried,” George mutters, covering his mic so that only Sapnap and Niki can hear. “I’m very worried.”

Things go smoothly until they get to the actual removal. The three of them are helpless as Puffy yelps something about the heat and the ship falling apart, Dream trying to calm her down, Techno barking at them to tell the rest of the crew what’s going on.

“GUYS!” George yells, and they fall silent. “I’m going to get one of the emergency EVA suits on and come down there, okay-”

“Absolutely not!” Techno practically roars. “Just *instruct them*, George- Sapnap, pull up the cameras, can you see them?”

“Not really,” Sapnap says as he pulls up the cameras surrounding the airlock.

“I need to go *down there*, Techno, they don’t know what they’re doing,” George protests.

“We’ll figure it out!” Dream says. “Stay *there*, George, you’re no use to us if you keep getting hurt!”

Sapnap can tell based on how George freezes that that was absolutely the wrong thing for Dream to say, but now isn’t the time to be unpacking that. That’s something they can worry about later.

“Fine,” George says quietly, clearly trying to keep the hurt out of his voice. “Okay.” He moves closer to Sapnap, looking at the cameras, placing one hand on Sapnap’s shoulder to steady himself. Sapnap reaches up and grips his hand, and George squeezes his shoulder in response. It’s a method of silent communication they’ve always pretended they don’t have- just a squeeze, letting the other know they’re there. Sapnap is here for him, and George’s squeeze shows that he appreciates it. “Puffy. Angle it a bit toward your right- there you go. Now take it out, just a tad, and Dream-”

They manage to get the plate removed, and Dream reveals the new one. George instructs them on how to put it back in, carefully, and once they're finished, Puffy untethers her suit and allows Dream to pull her back into the ship. Techno reels the line in and Sapnap closes the outer door in Airlock 2 and opens the inside one before it can depressurize and blow the whole ship to hell again. Techno floats his way across the bridge to Puffy and Dream, and Puffy instructs Sapnap on how to override the code again to close the door. The whole time, Niki conducts a sort of pseudo-check-up on George, making sure he's breathing deeply.

"Door closing," Sapnap says. "And..."

"Closed," Puffy confirms. "Holding?"

"Holding," Sapnap says. He switches through a few screens- the pressure is holding steady. "Depressurizing the rest of the ship now."

It takes nearly five minutes, the other three waiting in the airlock, and once the ship depressurizes, Sapnap finally allows himself to relax.

"All systems are good," he says, and the alarm that's been going since the beginning of all of this finally stops blaring. "*Hermes* is pressurized, you're clear to take off your EVA suits. Opening the rest of the hatches."

"Clear to go, Major," Techno agrees, and Sapnap flips a few switches. The hatch to the controls room opens, George and Niki both waiting with bated breath.

Nothing happens.

"Success!" Sapnap cries, and the crew applauds- apart from George. George doesn't move. "NASA, this is Major Nick Sapnap, reporting success in the fixing of the pressure in the busted airlock. We are a go for continued travel and eagerly await whatever fixes to our navigation course you may have. We'll wait for your call to implement those. Ending broadcast now."

Niki ends the broadcast quickly, sending Sapnap a thumbs-up. None of them take their headsets off, waiting for Techno's orders that are bound to follow.

"We're out of our suits," Techno reports. "Meet in the Rec, please."

“Copy,” Sapnap says, pulling his headset off. Niki watches George carefully as he makes his way out of the room and down to the bridge. Sapnap waits until they’re both through before he follows.

It feels nice, floating down the bridge to the Rec. Things are okay. They’ve solved this problem. The other three are already there when they arrive, and Sapnap smiles as Puffy and Niki collide, and then Dream collides with him a moment later. Over Dream’s shoulder, he can see Techno cautiously checking over George.

They did it. One emergency situation down. Damn, Sapnap thinks, they’re getting good at this.

Damn, George thinks, they fucking suck at this. If they had just let him get in a suit and go out there and fix it himself, it would’ve been done twice as fast, with a lot less screaming and frustration. He crosses his arms as Techno glances him over.

“I’m sorry,” George,” he says quietly. “You know I couldn’t have-”

“No,” George interrupts loudly, and Niki and Puffy pause in their embrace. Sapnap pulls away from Dream, and Dream- Dream won’t even look at him. “You could have. If you all stopped worrying about *my health* and let *me* worry about that-”

“George, it’s not that simple,” Techno growls, warningly, telling George to stop. George isn’t going to stop. Dream’s words- *you’re no use to us if you keep getting hurt*- struck a nerve. George isn’t sure what nerve it was, why that one phrase has him so upset, but he thinks he might have an inkling of an idea.

“It is,” George says, and the whole crew is watching him now. “It is that simple. It’s as simple as letting me do my fucking *job*, Commander, because I’m a fucking engineer! Not to mention I spent eighteen months on that damn planet going through *this*, situations like *this*, day after day after day, and none of you have any fucking idea-”

He cuts himself off, because he doesn’t want to say something he’s going to regret. They’re all watching him, but he holds his eye contact with Techno.

Technoblade is not someone who apologizes, not to anyone, and this case is no exception. Instead, he says, “You’re right. We don’t have any idea. So tell us.”

Don’t say that, George thinks. Don’t ask me to relive that. Instead of saying that, and he so desperately wants to say it, he does the unthinkable. He rips his shirt off in front of the whole crew and points to the burn scar on his left shoulder.

“This is from when I blew up the Hab, the first time,” he says, pointing to the ugly mash of burned skin that wraps its way around him. “I got blasted back into the air and set on fire because I didn’t account for my own oxygen while I was trying to figure out how to make water so that I could grow plants to survive.”

He points to a small scar on his abdomen. “This is from when the rover tipped in a dust storm and I got thrown around like clothes in a fucking drying machine.” He turns to show the long scar running diagonal across his back. “This is where I got cut when the Hab’s airlock blew off its hinges, forty feet through the air. I have no idea how high I got, but when I woke up, there was blood everywhere. I’m lucky it didn’t need stitches, because I wouldn’t have been able to do anything.”

He keeps going down the list, ignoring how stunned the crew looks, until finally he reaches the closed wound on his stomach, the long, jagged scar that’s the worst of them all.

“And this one,” he says. “Right here. Is from when I was stabbed by a communications antennae and left for dead on Mars.”

He stops. Freezes. Realizes his words. The whole crew is staring at him in shock. There are tears in Niki’s eyes, and Puffy’s got one hand covering her mouth. Techno is stoic as ever. Dream looks away when George meets his eyes. George is panting, furious, but he can feel the anger seeping out of his bones quickly. “I’m sorry,” he says, pulling his shirt back on. “You didn’t leave me. It was an accident-”

It is Sapnap who speaks. “No,” he says. “We did leave you. And you have every right to be pissed at every single one of us.”

“But I’m not,” George tells him. “At least, I don’t think I am.”

“But if you are,” Sapnap says seriously. “That’s okay. We’ll all understand.” He gives the crew a

look, like he's saying if they don't agree with him, he'll be coming after each one of them personally. George appreciates the sentiment.

"I'm sorry," he says again, trying to take deep breaths. *No lung transplant*, he reminds himself. "I was frustrated, and I shouldn't have taken it out on you guys. You're just trying to help me."

Dream won't meet his eyes. *You're no use to us if you keep getting hurt*. It's because of the idea that they only saved him because he's useful, that if he's damaged he's no good, and he is so, so fucking damaged.

"Nevertheless," Techno says. "I feel like it would be good for us to know what you went through. So we can at least try to understand."

"So we can help you," Puffy adds. "Because we want to help you, George, we really do. None of us mean to hurt you."

"Talk to Alyssa," Niki advises. "I think that'd be good for you."

George says nothing. Neither does the rest of the crew. He runs a hand through his hair and tries to hide his wince.

"You go do that," Techno says. "The rest of you, go do your checks, make sure nothing got damaged during the last hour."

And George hates that- being given different orders, being treated differently, but he knows it's necessary. He knows they're just trying to help him, to keep him safe, because they went through all that effort for him and he's just *George*, broken, damaged, George-

He doesn't send a message to Alyssa. He sits in the medbay and stares at the computer for a long time, and eventually, he pulls up his email. He inputs Alyssa's address, stares for a while longer, then thinks. And thinks. And thinks.

And then he deletes Alyssa's email from the bar and types in a different one, and then he hits send before he can regret it, and then he goes over to his bed in the medbay and lays back and thinks and thinks and thinks, and eventually, drifts off into a dreamless sleep.

TO: Dr. Wilbur Soot (wilbursoot@nasa.gov)

FROM: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: video logs

hey wil,

what are the chances nasa would be able to recover my video logs? the crew wants to know what i went through, but i'm not ready to tell that story yet. maybe it's something they could see. to help them understand, or whatever.

best,

george

Chapter End Notes

the [spotify playlist](#) for this work :))

[twitter](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated!

Zeus

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

TO: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

FROM: Dr. Wilbur Soot (wilbursoot@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: RE: video logs

George-

My apologies for replying so late. We were having that discussion ourselves. We do need to talk about the risks this involves- we may be able to buy you some time, but if the logs are recovered, they will have to be released to the public at some point.

Since they're private astronaut logs, technically it's up to you whether the public sees them or not. However, there's the likelihood they'll be subpoenaed as documents by the investigations committee, making them public property.

This means, if we go about recovering the logs, you have until then to show them to just the crew, or whomever you want them to be released to.

Let us know what you think of this.

-Wilbur

TO: Dr. Wilbur Soot (wilbursoot@nasa.gov)

FROM: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: RE: RE: video logs

wil,

sorry for delayed response. had to think about it.

recover them. the crew needs to see.

-george

It takes three days for Wilbur to get back to George. In those three days, he doesn't talk to anyone- Niki does her medical checks on him every day, then sits with him for hours so he isn't left alone. Occasionally she tells him she has to go and do other tasks, and that's when he records his video logs, mostly just rambling about his mental state and the crew and how much he wants to feel useful again.

When he wakes up, Niki is always there, already awake and bustling around. Sometimes he wakes up in the middle of the night and thinks he sees a figure watching him from the entrance of the medbay, and he turns over and goes back to sleep.

He emails Wilbur a day later, because he does have to think about it. He makes a mental list of pros and cons and lists them off to the computer while Niki's eating lunch with the rest of the crew. The next day, he sends the email back. Mission day 757- two hundred and three days until home.

Mere moments after he sends the email during one of his rare moments alone, Niki drops back down into the medbay with a glare on her face.

"Your moping is done," she announces. "We're going to go eat lunch with the crew."

"I'm still sick," George says, returning her glare. It's a complete lie- he's been able to keep his food without feeling nauseated the past two days, his vision is completely clear, the only issue has been the occasional headache and his broken ribs.

"You're not sick," Niki says harshly. "You're going to drive yourself back into depression."

"I can't talk to them, Niki," he says, and he tries to keep his voice from breaking. It doesn't work.

Niki's glare turns into a pitiful look, and he hates it, he hates that look, he doesn't want their pity, he doesn't want anything from them-

"Fine," Niki says. She sits down on the bed he's been sleeping in, and he wheels the chair to face her. "Don't talk to them. Talk to me. What's going through your head?"

He thinks about it for a moment, and then he laughs. He laughs, because he has no idea what's going through his head. He tells Niki as much.

"Alright," Niki shrugs. "Find somewhere to start. What did you talk about today?"

"I haven't done that yet," he admits.

"What did you do, then?" He feels like a little kid, but the look of pity is gone and she's looking at him patiently, like she'll take all the time he needs, and he finds that he appreciates it.

"I emailed Wilbur. About getting my video logs, so that you guys could maybe watch them. Try to understand."

"Good," Niki says, nodding. "That's a good start. You want us to understand. Um- I'm going to be honest with you, I'm not exactly a professional here."

"That's okay, Niki," George says. "I'm not a professional at a lot of things and I still did them."

And then he stops. Frowns. Because he had to play every part of an entire crew and then some, and that's what they don't understand, that he's capable, that he can do things even when he's injured, but they don't *trust* him-

"Tell me what's going on in your head," Niki says softly.

So he does. He spills everything to her, about how he feels useless and he hasn't felt that way in a long time, not when he's so used to handling everything by himself. How he hates their pity, how he wants to be perceived as strong instead of weak, how he doesn't want to be the one in need of rescue. He talks, and she listens, and he tells her things he hadn't even known he'd been feeling.

She nods the whole time, occasionally stops to ask a question, and when he's done, he's out of breath.

"Okay," she says. "There's a lot to unpack there. Take a few deep breaths." She breathes with him, and he focuses on that sound, lets his lungs expand like the night sky, and when he's calmed down, she smiles at him. "Do you want me to talk to the crew?"

"No," he replies. "I have to do it. I'll- I'll seek them out."

"Okay," Niki says. "You do that. Today. Because they miss you, George. We miss you. We missed you for so long, and now-" She cuts herself off, smiling, covering her face with her hands. "I'm sorry, I know this is about you-"

"It's okay, Niki," George says, and he reaches out and she grasps his hand. "I don't want it to be about just me. It's about all of us, really. Our crew. Our story."

"Our story," Niki echoes. She's definitely crying now, and George doesn't blame her. He feels like he could cry, too. "Okay. Good. Yes. I'm going to just- I'm going to go to my room, maybe- I'm sorry."

She rushes off, still smiling through watery eyes, and George follows her slowly. He heads toward the gym, figuring at least someone will be there. Indeed, Puffy's on the treadmill, staring out into the vast expanse of space as she runs. George doesn't want to startle her, so he carefully approaches the window and stares out in the same direction. He waits until he hears the treadmill slow, then stop, before he turns back.

"Hey," Puffy says. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine," George says slowly. "I mean. I'm not fine. But. I will be."

"And that's all that matters," she tells him. She sits down on the floor of the gym and pats the ground next to her, and he sits without hesitation. They stare out the window for a moment, and George thinks that all the skies of Earth have nothing on this view. Zeus can take his skies; George will take the stars. "You hate feeling useless, yeah?"

"Yeah," George agrees.

“I get like that sometimes, you know? I see things happening that are out of my control, nothing I can do to change them. I’m used to having control over systems, and when I don’t, it gets frustrating.”

“Stop talking to me like I’m a kid and get to your point, Puffy,” George says, rolling his eyes, but he grins at her to show that he’s joking. Puffy grins back at him.

“I know you want control,” Puffy says. “And I know you’re used to doing everything yourself. But you don’t *have* to anymore, George. Letting us take care of you for a bit doesn’t make you any lesser. You’ve been taking care of yourself for so long, and-”

She stops talking, completely caught off guard, when George lunges to the side and pulls her into a hug. She laughs once she’s gotten her bearings and hugs him back, and it feels nice. She squeezes him a little too hard and he finds that he doesn’t mind, almost, it’s reminding him that he’s alive.

“Ahem,” Technoblade’s voice says from behind them, and they both startle and turn around. “Am I interrupting something?”

“No, Commander,” George says. Puffy pulls herself to her feet, then offers a hand to George.

He takes it.

“I was just going to come look for you, actually,” he says. “I wanted to apologize for the other day. And for sort of- disappearing. I didn’t mean to question your decisions-”

“Yes you did,” Techno says flatly.

“Yes I did,” George agrees, sagging. “I’m still struggling to wrap my head around everything, you know? But I am sorry.”

“I am, too,” Techno admits begrudgingly. And Techno is not the type of person to apologize- to anyone- so this feels huge to George. It feels like the crew is really seeing him, is understanding him, is-

He needs to talk to Dream.

“I need to talk to Dream,” he says out loud, swallowing harshly.

“That’s a conversation I don’t need to be part of,” Techno says. “Maybe see Sapnap first. He’s better at these kinds of things.”

“What, emotional vulnerability?” Puffy jokes. She gives George a little shove. “Go get him, lover boy.”

“Not that kind of conversation,” George groans. When he exits the gym, he floats in the bridge for a bit, just relaxing, until he decides to head for the controls room. He has no idea what their plan is for getting back on course, but he isn’t surprised when he finds Sapnap fiddling with the controls. He sits in his usual seat without saying anything and waits for Sapnap to turn back and look at him.

“Hey,” Sapnap says. He doesn’t look surprised to see George. “Niki just stopped by. Said to not piss you off. I probably wasn’t supposed to tell you that, but what’s the harm in knowing?” He shifts in his seat, and George can pick up on his nervous energy. He offers a reassuring smile and says,

“She says I’m supposed to talk to you guys and I’m not allowed to mope anymore. What kind of doctor is she?”

“A good one,” Sapnap says with a nod. “What’s on your mind, Georgie?”

“You not calling me Georgie, for starters. What are you up to?” He gets up and wanders over to Sapnap’s chair, leaning against the back of it as Sapnap turns back to his controls.

It’s easiest with Sapnap, somehow. Because if there’s something Sapnap needs to say to him, he’ll come outright and say it, even if it comes off as mean. Because he and Sapnap have been friends since long before the Ares III mission, and since Sapnap has never bullshitted him in the past and won’t do it now. Because anything they need to say can just go unspoken. Unlike with the rest of the crew, who need clarity because they’re all anxious messes. Unlike with Dream, because it’s always been easy to talk with Dream in the same way it’s easy to not talk with Sapnap.

“Correcting our course,” he says. “Overall, it comes down to just. Not using the right amounts of fuel for certain periods of time. Quackity had to give me the override codes so the alarms turned off when we’re using the ion engines at dangerously low levels, but from there it’s just a matter of changing things up every now and then. Nothing really out of the ordinary.”

“Good,” George says. “That’s good. Good to know we’re not gonna get stuck in another... whatever it was you guys did.”

“A gravity assisted loop-around,” Sapnap offers, and George nods. He vaguely remembers hearing about it from NASA shortly before his communications got disconnected by his own stupid actions. “What are you up to, other than going around and letting us know you’re not dead?”

It’s a joke in poor taste, and Sapnap cringes immediately. George surprises himself by laughing.

“Thinking, mostly,” he says. “About how I don’t want you guys to pity me. And humor is a great coping mechanism, so please, make more jokes like that. I promise I’m not delicate.”

“I know you’re not, George. You’re probably the strongest out of all of us,” Sapnap replies honestly. “I could give you a big long speech about how we only want the best for you, but I know you wouldn’t listen.”

“You’re right, I wouldn’t.”

He would.

“How’s... how’s Dream?”

“He’s Dream,” Sapnap shrugs. “It would do you good to talk to him. He’s not sure what he did wrong. I told him it was the ‘no use to us if-’”

“‘-you keep getting hurt’ comment,” George finishes. “Yeah, that was it. What made you realize?”

“The way you tensed up and shut down when he said it,” Sapnap says. “I know you, George. I can see when something affects you. The whole crew could tell, probably, but none of them wanted to

say anything. What was it about it that got to you?"

George shrugs. "I think the idea that I'm- not useful if I'm damaged, you know? And I'm- I'm coming to the realization, Sapnap, that I am very fucking damaged. Mentally and physically."

"And that's okay," Sapnap tells him. "We all know you are, and that's perfectly okay. You're still useful to us, no matter what. We just don't want you getting injured. Call us protective."

"I will," George laughs. "You guys added a year and a half in space onto your mission because you didn't trust someone else to get me home. You're insanely protective."

"We did do that, didn't we?" Sapnap muses. He laughs, and George laughs with him. It only hurts his ribs a little bit. "Go talk to Dream, yeah?"

"Yeah," George says. "I'll see you at dinner, Sapnap."

"Ooh, gonna grace us with your presence today, Mr. Almighty?"

"You'd be so lucky!" he calls over his shoulder as he heads out of the room. He floats across the bridge toward the Rec, and his excitement over joking around with Sapnap dissipates into something more anxious. This conversation has to go well. It *has* to.

Dream is sitting on one of the couches, looking at his laptop and smiling. When George lands on the ground, he glances up, then shuts the computer quickly and stands. He crosses over to George in three long strides and stops a foot away.

"Hey," he breathes out, much too quietly.

"Hey," George says. "How are you?"

Dream stops. "How am- how am I? How are *you*, George? I feel- I fucked up. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," George shrugs.

“It was the comment, yeah? You’re no use to us if you’re hurt? I admit that wasn’t my brightest moment.”

“None of your moments are bright,” George quips instantly, and Dream wheezes.

“Sure, sure, and yet you’re the one that blew yourself up by not accounting for your own oxygen, apparently,” Dream retorts. He does the same thing Sapnap did, where he cringes back at a joke he thinks George isn’t ready for, and George verbally dismisses it by saying,

“I’ll have you know I had other things on my mind. Like surviving. Getting back to you.”

“To me?” Dream asks, suddenly quiet again. It just slipped out, George hadn’t really meant to say it- he swallows harshly. There are two ways he could take this, it’s not too late, he could backtrack-

“Yeah,” he says eventually. “To you. And the whole crew, really, but I knew you would miss me too much to function.”

Boom. Perfect backtrack, he thinks. Dream laughs awkwardly and rubs the back of his neck, his cheeks a little red. His freckles stand out more; he’s beautiful. George can feel his face heating up and he clears his throat.

“But seriously,” he says. “The comment was- I mean. It was unappreciated, obviously, but I figured I should explain why? Not leave you in the dark?”

He cringes inwardly. God, he’s terrible at this.

“Yeah,” Dream agrees, almost too quickly, too eager to move back to the topic of conversation. “Yeah, I know it was bad-”

“Because I am,” George finishes for him. “Hurt. On the inside and the outside- er- mentally and physically, I mean. I’m hurt. And I’m still useful.”

“Of course you’re useful,” Dream rushes to say. “You’re- hell, you’re smarter than all of us, probably, surviving like you did-”

“Dream,” George interrupts him. “Let me finish.”

“Right.”

“It was a moment of panic for everyone, and I know now that you guys are just, insanely protective, or something, so I understand. I do.”

“Do you?” Dream asks softly, not unkindly. “I mean, you know we care about you, after everything, but do you *understand* that we care about you?”

George does not need this right now. He’s probably going to cry, and he’s been *so* good about not crying today, it’s impressive he didn’t burst into tears when Niki did, so instead of responding with words and letting his voice break, he just shrugs, holds his arms in front of his chest. Dream looks at him, then reaches out and grabs his upper arms and gives them a little squeeze, trying to encourage him to talk.

“I’m just some scientist,” he says eventually, his voice small. “I still don’t get why so many people worked so hard to save me.”

“For what it’s worth, the whole world probably did it for what you represent,” Dream says. “Humanity. The pursuit of knowledge. Doing things for *good*, not for gain. But to us, it’s because it was you. Because we’re a family. We don’t leave one of our own behind, not when there’s even the slightest chance we could save them.”

You did leave me behind, George wants to joke, but he figures it’s probably a little too soon for that one. Instead, he smiles, ducks his head to try and hide it, because it’s a good joke, really. Dream reaches one hand out to his chin and tilts his head up.

“I’ve missed your smile,” he says softly, and oh, this is a moment, they’re having a moment, and George’s eyes dart down for just a millisecond before meeting Dream’s again, and then-

And then Puffy above them calls down, “Oi, get out of the entrance if you’re going to be just standing there!” Dream quickly lets go of George and they both rush to sit on opposite ends of one

of the couches. Dream opens his laptop and Puffy slides down the entrance, landing firmly on the ground and sending them a calculating look. Determining something, she grabs her own laptop and then bounds over to sit between them on the couch.

“We’re looking at pictures of Earth courtesy of our families,” she says firmly, pressing herself against George. “It’s going to be our new weekly tradition so we know what we’re coming back to. The others should be joining us soon.”

George and Dream grin at each other from over Puffy’s head, and she pulls up a picture of a forest. Yeah, George thinks, today’s turning out to be a good day.

“Got the email,” Wilbur says into his phone. He’s got Fundy on the other end and the email from George pulled up on his computer. “He wants us to go for it.”

“I’ll let the media know we’re getting access to the logs, then, but since they’re private they won’t be released to the public,” Fundy says. “Or would you rather I just didn’t say anything about it?”

“Gonna have to talk to Phil and Bad on that one,” Wilbur says. “Although I can already guess what they’ll say. Where are you right now?”

“On my way to your office,” Fundy says. “One sec.” Wilbur hears the phone move away from his ear and then his distant voice say, “Phil, we’ve got a response from George. Wil’s in his office.”

“Why do I have to go down to Wil’s office?” Phil’s voice complains. “I’m the higher-up.”

“Because Wil’s the one with the email and it’ll do you good to walk, old man,” Fundy retorts, and then much louder, with the phone back by his ear, “We’ll be down in a few, Wilbur. Do you want me to grab Bad?”

Bad himself chooses that moment to open Wilbur’s office door without knocking. “No need,” Wilbur says into the phone. “He just got here.”

“See you soon.”

Fundy hangs up without another word. Bad sits down in the seat across from Wilbur's desk.

"How'd you know we were meeting?" Wilbur asks.

"Call it a hunch," Bad says. "Fundy walked past me while he was on the phone. Do we have an affirmative?"

"We do," Wilbur says. "So now we're debating on whether we should tell the public or not."

"We do what George wants, obviously," Bad says, and Wilbur mentally pats himself on the back. That's what he thought Bad would say. "Unless, of course, the rest of you want to start making decisions for him."

"Bad," Wilbur says warningly. Bad raises his hands in mock surrender.

"I know, I know," he says. "Good of the people, and all that."

"Not even," Wilbur says. "Investigations committee."

"Right," Bad hisses under his breath. "Muffins."

Fundy and Phil enter the office a few moments later, the director looking a bit disgruntled, Fundy looking slightly perkier than usual.

"I've had four cups of coffee today," he says when Wilbur sends him a look. Phil sits down next to Bad; Fundy stands by the window, phone clutched in one hand as always.

"That's not healthy," Wilbur says. He's one to talk; he's had five. "So. The public."

"Is it something they really need to know?" Bad says immediately. "It's not like they're going to have access to the logs. It'll just increase pressure on us to release them, and that means increased

pressure on George.”

“We don’t necessarily need to tell George about public pressure,” Wilbur points out. “We’ve censored information being sent to them before, we can do it again.”

“Oh, and that turned out *so* well last time,” Bad scoffs.

“It’s not the same case and you know it,” Wilbur says.

“Boys,” Phil interrupts. “I’m sick of the bickering. We’re not censoring information anymore, that’s going to reflect badly on us during the investigation. We need to have that at the back of our minds at all times, for the sake of the crew and the sake of our jobs.”

“And public interest,” Fundy adds. “We’ve been getting a lot of questions about it. We’re going to have to meet with them soon, probably, figure out what they’ve come up with.”

“Oh, they’ll be pinning the blame on Commander Technoblade, easily,” Wilbur snorts. He doesn’t want it to happen, but he knows it will.

“And the whole crew will stand by his side,” Bad says. “As will I.”

He gives the other three a pointed look. They each look away.

Wilbur knows where he stands. He stands with his brother. But he also has a duty, to his job, to space exploration, to-

He stands with his brother. If Techno gets court martialed, Wilbur is going down too.

“Back to the topic,” Fundy says. “What am I telling the media?”

“Tell them we have access to the logs,” Phil says, making a decision before either Wilbur or Bad can say anything. “But stress that, as with all astronaut records, they’re private and will stay that way. Don’t even mention the ‘unless legal action is taken’ bit. They don’t need to know that.”

“Good,” Fundy says with a nod. “Fine. That’s what I’ll do, then. Thank you guys for meeting today, yada yada yada, how’s everything on *Hermes* going? Anything I need to know?”

“Course adjustments have been made and the ship is fully on track for an end date of mission day 960,” Bad reports. “And Niki’s told us that George’s acceleration sickness is pretty much fully gone. Just waiting on the ribs to heal now.”

“Good,” Fundy says. “That’ll be good, I can use that as a distractor from the video logs. I’m going to go- oh, hold on.” His phone starts ringing, and he fumbles with it for a moment before picking up and walking briskly out of the room. Phil and Bad don’t get up.

“I actually have work to do,” Wilbur says pointedly. Neither of them move. He sighs. “What is it?”

“I’m making you take the rest of the day off, mate,” Phil says decidedly. “You’ve earned it.”

Jesus H, he actually has things he needs to be doing, mission plans he needs to sign off on, they’ve got four more Ares missions coming up, they’re going to need to start preps to take care of the *Hermes*, there’s so much on his plate-

“Wilbur,” Bad says. “Go home. Ares can wait until tomorrow.”

“Right,” Wilbur says. “You’re right. It can.”

Phil stays until he’s actually closed his office down for the night. It’s three in the afternoon, so it’s not even like he’s really leaving that early- he’s just so used to being on call twenty four-seven. He makes his way down to his car and is almost surprised to see Tommy there waiting for him.

“Hey, big man,” Tommy says.

“Hey,” Wilbur replies. “What’re you doing here?”

“Dadza sent me to make sure you actually went home,” Tommy tells him.

“Don’t call him that, he’s your superior,” Wilbur says jokingly as he unlocks his car.

“I’ve also seen him fall into a pool fully-clothed holding a bottle of apple juice, there’s some things you just can’t come back from, he’ll always be Dadza to me. How was your day?”

“Why are you getting into my car?” Wilbur asks in lieu of a response.

“Dadza sent me to make sure you actually went home,” Tommy repeats. “That means I’m not going anywhere until you’re fully in bed and sound asleep.”

“Do you know how much coffee I’ve drank today, Tommy? I’m going to clean my entire apartment.”

“Then I’ll help you do that. It’s not like I have anything else to be doing.”

“Other than your job?”

“Dick.”

Wilbur laughs and starts the car. He yells at Tommy to buckle up and drives them back to his apartment, and Tommy does in fact help him clean the entire place. Tommy refuses to touch the bathroom, but he does a pretty good job on the kitchen, at least, until Wilbur throws soap suds at him and then they get into a mini soap fight that ends with a bucket of water on Wilbur’s head and all over the kitchen floor.

“You’re cleaning that up and I’m taking a shower,” he tells Tommy.

“You just did,” Tommy points out, cackling, and Wilbur throws the bucket at him.

He feels a bit like a kid. It’s nice, really, not having to worry about anything other than the mess they’ve created- a good mess this time, not a bad one. He hasn’t had this much fun in a while.

Of course, all good things must come to an end. Shortly after they've finished cleaning the mess up, his cell phone starts ringing, and Quackity's contact pops up when he flips his phone over. He gestures for Tommy to be quiet and answers quickly.

"Hey," he says. "What's up?"

"I'm going to be in Houston tomorrow," Quackity says on the other end, and he sounds impossibly stressed. "We have a problem."

"So basically," Puffy finishes. "That's the issue."

"That we can't play Mario Kart?" Techno asks, raising an eyebrow.

"I *miss* it, Commander," Puffy says. "And I really, really need to beat George's ass to prove that he's no longer the best at Mario Kart."

"You also haven't played Mario Kart in months, I hope you realize that," George points out.

They're all gathered in the Rec, spread out around the room. Niki's curled up in the corner of one couch, watching Puffy with a fond smile on her face. Puffy's standing near her computer, trying desperately to download Mario Kart from a file her brother sent her. Techno's standing on the other end of the room, cup of coffee in one hand, *The Art of War* in the other. Sapnap is sitting upside down on the other end of Niki's house, head swiveling back and forth between all of them. Dream's sitting on the other couch, George's feet in his lap, both of them attempting to read.

It's been three weeks since the rescue- three weeks that have quickly turned into some of the best of George's life. He's in constant pain, sure, but he just loves this damn crew so much and he's so happy to be back with them. They haven't had a lot of contact from NASA, which has been a bit worrisome, but Bad assured them that nothing was wrong in his last email, so they decide not to worry about it.

"I'm pretty sure we can't get Mario Kart up here, Puffy," Techno says, looking completely bemused. George wants to laugh.

“Fine!” Puffy says. “Fine! So I guess the mega-sized file from NASA *isn’t* Mario Kart?”

“Mega-sized file?” Dream asks, glancing over. “From NASA? And you’re just telling us about this now?”

“The Mario Kart was more important,” Puffy insists. “I haven’t even opened the thing from NASA, it’s a whole huge folder of video messages, I-”

Sapnap falls off the couch. Niki gasps. Techno and Dream both immediately look to George. Puffy realizes as all this happens what a huge folder of video messages probably means.

“Oh,” she says. “Did you get anything?”

“No,” George says, shaking his head. “I figured they’d forgotten, it’s been like two and a half weeks.” He told the crew he sent the email, he just assumed they’d forgotten about it too. Obviously, he was wrong on both counts.

“It’s up to you whether we watch them or not,” Techno says firmly. “And if you’re here when we do.”

“I don’t want to be here for it,” George says quickly. “But I want you to watch them. It’s- it’s easier than me telling you guys everything.”

“Alright,” Techno says with a firm nod. “Do you want us to start now?”

“Sure,” George says. “Sure, um- I can watch the first one, I think. I don’t think it’ll be that bad. Alyssa says it wouldn’t hurt to try watching them.”

“If you’re sure,” Dream says softly, one hand grasping George’s ankle. George nods. Puffy brings her laptop over and sets it up on the table, and the crew gets comfortable. George laces his fingers through Dream’s, then tries to stop the blush from rushing to his face. Puffy pulls the video up, and George immediately cringes when he sees his own face.

He looks like complete shit, honestly. His hair is a mess and he’s got his suit half-on, and there’s a

piece of metal sticking out of his gut.

“Oh my God,” Niki says instantly. Sapnap looks away; Dream looks to George.

“That’s what happened?” he asks. “I thought it just cut you.”

“No, it impaled me,” George says, nodding, trying to tear his eyes away from the image of himself on the screen. “Just play it before I change my mind, Puffy.”

“Okay,” Puffy agrees, hitting play.

“I’m fucked,” is the first thing video-George says, his voice blaring through the speakers of the Rec. George laughs, then tightens his grip on Dream’s hand. Video-George glances down at the piece of metal still embedded in his stomach. “I should probably do something about that before I explain everything else, though, so. If you’re watching this, I’d probably look away right about now. I’m no medical doctor, so- Niki, don’t yell at me for how horrible this goes.”

Niki laughs. “I would never,” she tells George. He gives her a look. “Okay, I might. Should I not watch?”

“I think I pause the recording pretty soon, actually,” he says. Video-George pulls the piece of metal out of his stomach and then fucking *screams*, and the crew reacts viscerally. Sapnap full-body winces, reaching out for George’s hand. Niki gasps and covers her mouth. Puffy eyes narrow, and Techno puts one hand to his mouth, not tearing his eyes away. Dream actually turns his whole body into George’s, like he’s going to protect him, and moves his hand to wrap it around George’s shoulders.

Thankfully, video-George reaches out and pauses, and when it starts again, there’s no sign of the injury. There *is* George, sitting there in a very obviously oversized hoodie that does not belong to him.

“Is that… mine?” Dream asks. George can feel the red-hot heat in his face.

“Maybe,” he says.

“Okay,” video-George says, and he pulls the sweatshirt up to reveal the nice new line of stitches going diagonally across his stomach. “I lost, frankly, a lot of blood, but I’m alive. Surprise!”

He takes a deep breath and runs a hand through his hair. George himself takes a deep breath, and Sapnap squeezes his hand.

“Surprise indeed,” Techno mutters.

“So. Sol 6. We got our shit rocked by a dust storm, I must’ve got hit by something, and the telemetry on my suit was totally fucked, meaning the crew likely thought I was dead on impact. Surprise, I’m not! I’m here and kicking, and not very pleased about the situation.

“Not at my crew- they did their best. I’m not very pleased with Mars. Which sucks, because I’m gonna be here probably for the rest of my life. Go me!”

“Go me,” George echoes, laughing. There are tears in his eyes. He doesn’t know how much longer he can watch this.

“That is kind of cool, though- I’m currently the only person on this entire planet. I’m currently the only *botanist* on this entire planet, which means, logically, I’m the best botanist in the world. Suck it, Dream. He can’t say the same because even though he’s our chemist, I still don’t know how he got his degree.”

“Hey!” Dream protests, and George buries his head in Dream’s chest to try and hide the fact that he’s crying.

“Not to mention the fact that Sapnap is probably a better navigator than him.”

“That’s just mean,” Dream mutters, pressing his lips against the top of George’s hair. George takes a few more deep breaths, trying to calm himself down.

“So, I’m just sort of better by default. I don’t even know what I’m saying. I’m just rambling. Dear diary, today I almost died and then got abandoned on a hostile planet. Fuck. I need to figure out how I’m going to survive.”

The video cuts again, George can hear Puffy's soft "Oh," as it does, and then his voice continues.

"There's enough food for six people for fifty days. That's three hundred days of food, which I can easily stretch out by just eating less.. There are plenty of EVA suits for when I inevitably need to leave the Hab and go out on the planet. Water is going to be a more difficult problem to solve, but it'll be okay. It'll be fine. Communications- I checked everything. It's all down. There's literally no way to get in contact with Earth, no way to get in contact with the *Hermes*, no way for anyone to know that I'm still alive. I'm going to die here."

George tears himself away from Dream's chest and hits pause before the video can continue.

"Sorry," he says breathlessly, hastily wiping the tears from his eyes as he stands up. "Sorry, I can't- I can't watch it anymore, um-"

"That's okay," Niki says quickly, Dream reaching out to take his hand again, to keep him from running. "We can stop for today, you don't have to-"

"I can't watch it at all," he says, shaking his head. "I don't- I don't know. I'm sorry-"

"Don't apologize," Techno says firmly. "None of this is your fault. We'll stop for today, and you can make a decision tomorrow on whether you want the rest of us to keep watching it or not. Okay?"

"Okay," George agrees, allowing Dream to tug him back down onto the couch. Sapnap shifts so that his head can rest in George's lap, and Dream pulls him back against his chest and wraps both arms around him protectively.

Puffy puts her laptop away, then shoves Sapnap over so she can sit by them, dragging Niki over, too. Techno reluctantly settles on the ground near them, opening his book, and George keeps taking deep breaths. Dream is running one hand up and down his arm slowly, and he breathes in time with it, and at some point, he drifts off to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

[this fic's spotify playlist](#)

comments/kudos/subs/etc are always always always appreciated!

Artemis

Chapter Notes

welcome back to 'jonesy don't proofread their writing' i'm your host mr. jonesy bonesy here to give you another episode now featuring all-new video logs, romantic tension, and literal sleeping together

as usual. i did not proofread this. just take it

A NOTE

there is a depiction of a panic attack in this chapter. if you would like to skip it, go from the line "And when he wakes up--" to the paragraph beginning with "He has no idea how much time has passed..."

make sure to take care of yourselves! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George wakes up with a warm body pressed against his. He blinks a few times, trying to clear the sleep from his eyes, and turns back to see Dream, out cold, snoring a little bit. George's back is resting on his chest, and Dream's got both arms wrapped around him protectively. There's a blanket draped over both of them and no sign of anyone else in the crew.

He thinks he should probably get up- he doesn't want to make things awkward when Dream awakens. But he's comfortable, and the gentle humming of the ship is already beginning to rock him back to sleep, and everything is warm and bright and so very right. He lets his head fall back against Dream's shoulder and it doesn't take long before he's falling asleep again.

The second time he wakes up, Dream is already up, gazing out the window as they float past the vast expanse of space. When he sees that George is awake and attempting to sit up, he unwraps his arms and gently guides him to a seated position. George smiles at him and takes a few deep breaths, like Niki told him to do in the mornings, and rests comfortably against Dream's side. Dream keeps one arm wrapped around him.

"Hey," George says eventually. "Sorry for falling asleep on you."

"No problem," Dream says. "I was comfortable, don't worry."

“I wasn’t worried.”

Dream gives him a look, a half-grin, and he gets up and stretches. George hears his back pop and mimics the movement. It hurts his ribs a bit, but considerably less than after when he was first rescued. He’s recovering. He’s getting better.

Physically, at least.

They join the rest of the crew for breakfast, a silent affair, everyone just enjoying themselves. George is still, technically speaking, severely malnourished, so he’s still eating differently than the rest of them. But he’s feeling stronger already, and Niki and the team of doctors and nutritionists at NASA are hopeful that he’ll make a full physical recovery.

He reluctantly parts from Dream and follows Niki to the medbay so she can do her check-ups, and she leaves him alone for long enough that he can record a video log about the previous day and his near panic attack, and then send an email to Alyssa about everything that happened. She responds almost instantly (or at least, as quickly as the distance between them allows), saying that she’s proud of him and recommending that he really think about it before he watches the rest of the logs.

He does think about it, extensively, as he trails after the other members of the crew as they do their various science jobs around the ship. He thinks about it while he watches Niki with her small collection of lab mice, he thinks about it while he watches Sapnap checking their fuel sources and their course, he thinks about it while he watches Techno (who’s technically a geologist) play with rocks, he thinks about it while he goes through systems checks with Puffy, he thinks about it while he distracts Dream from whatever chemistry stuff he’s supposed to be doing. And when they have free time and they gather in the Rec, Puffy’s laptop pulled up, he comes to a decision.

“I can’t watch the rest of them,” he says. “I might pop in now and then, but I don’t- I don’t think it would be good for me to relive this. Not yet.”

Not when he only escaped this Hell three weeks ago. Not when his ribs are still healing, his chest is still bruised, he can see his bones from under his skin. No one in the crew faults him for it, and he wanders off as they play the next video. He’s still there to catch his voice saying, “Sol 7!” He remembers that day, still in Dream’s sweatshirt, thinking he was going to go absolutely crazy. “Guess what?” his voice continues as he wanders out of the room. “I’m literally a botanist, and we have a shit ton of potatoes here! Commander, I take back everything I’ve ever said about you and your potatoes, because these babies are going to save my fucking life.”

He can hear the crew laughing, he can imagine Technoblade smiling, and he pauses at the entrance. "I'm going to figure out how to farm on Mars. I'm going to fucking colonize Mars!"

He pulls himself up the ladder and back onto the bridge. He doesn't need to hear the rest of it. He already knows how that story goes.

"Sol 8," George's voice says. "This is going to be harder than I thought."

All five of them are crammed onto the couch. Dream is in the middle, and he's got Puffy pressed up against one side and Sapnap pressed against the other. Niki is leaning over Puffy, both hands clutched in her own, and Techno is on Sapnap's other side, leaning on the armrest of the couch rather than on Sapnap himself. They've barely made it through three days of logs and Dream has already seen three completely different sides of George- terrified on Sol 6, manic on Sol 7, and now completely despondent on Sol 8. He hates it. He hates seeing George like this, even though it's in the past, because there's nothing he can do to change it.

They make it through Sol 10. Then 11, 12, and 13, and when they hit 14, George finally is wearing something other than Dream's sweatshirt. He's almost disappointed.

"Sol 14," George on the video announces. "I am combining waste and dirt to create something I can grow potatoes in. I am mixing shit with Martian dirt. It's vaguely disgusting."

"The entire floor of the Hab is 92 square meters, and I plan on dedicating all of them to this endeavor. At a depth of ten centimeters, I'm going to have to transport 9.2 cubic meters of Martian soil into the Hab. Considering I can get maybe one-tenth through the airlock at a time, it'll be absolute ass to collect it. But I'll have 92 square meters of crop-able soil."

"Fear my fucking botany powers, Mars."

The whole crew laughs, even Techno, and the video cuts to a new day. George starts by running a hand through his hair, and Dream mimics the movement self-consciously. He knows George is just down the hall, but his heart aches for him, wants to hold him again, wants to tell him everything's going to be alright. Because it will be alright, some day.

“Sol 15,” George says. “This is fucking backbreaking work. I spent twelve hours today on EVAs bringing dirt into the Hab and I barely managed to cover a corner of the base. It’s going to take me weeks to get all the soil in. But hey, time is one thing I’ve got plenty of.

“I ache all over. The shovels are all for taking samples, not heavy digging. Thankfully I found some Vicodin. God bless painkillers.”

That’s another thing that Dream admires about George- his sense of humor. Even when everything seemed hopeless, George never lost his sense of humor. It probably kept him sane, alive. It makes Dream miss him more, even though he’s on the ship. He knows tonight will be a night he slips down to the medbay to check on George while he sleeps.

“Sol 16. Water. My doctorate degree in botany makes me pretty sure plants need wet dirt to grow in. Unfortunately, the water reclaimer does not make enough water to supply all 92 square meters of my crops. I can cover about 62 and a half and still have enough left for myself to drink comfortably. So I need to create water to make sacrifices to the dirt gods, or something. Is there a god of dirt? I know there’s gods of the earth, and agriculture, and all that. Maybe I should pray to Demeter. Or maybe not. I feel like Artemis would be a better choice, for the sole reason that Artemis is cool and she’s got the whole fuck men thing going on. I can relate to that, because it’s mankind that abandoned me here.”

All movement stills. George’s face is completely serious. Then,

“I’m just kidding. She does the moon stuff, too, and I think I like the moon a lot better than Mars right now. Mars is cool and all, but at least if I were on the Moon it’d be easier to get me home.

“Anyways. Today is Thanksgiving. Not that that matters, since I’m British, but it’s got me thinking about my family. They probably just got done with my funeral.”

George’s funeral. A very public affair. The crew all had to record statements to be given. Dream could barely make it through three words before bursting into tears. He thinks Techno’s the only one that gave his without crying.

“I wonder if they’ll ever find out what really happened. I’ve been so busy staying alive I never thought of what this must be like for my parents. Right now, they’re probably suffering the worst pain anyone can endure. I’d give anything to let them know I’m still alive.

“I’ll just have to survive to make up for it.”

He thinks of the picture George’s parents sent, the selfie with Dream’s mother. How happy they looked, knowing their son was alive and on his way home. George made it. George *fucking made it*.

“I think that’s enough for today,” Techno murmurs, and Puffy leans forward to pause the video. “We can always resume tomorrow.”

“Right,” Dream says, getting up from the couch and making his way out of the Rec immediately. He goes to the gym on a hunch and isn’t surprised to see George sitting in front of the window, watching the ship spin past, watching the stars float by.

“How much did you get through?” George asks without turning around.

“Sol 15,” Dream replies. “You were talking about your parents.”

George nods, hums something unintelligible. Dream thinks it might be Pigstep.

“I blow myself up soon, I think,” George says suddenly. Dream sits down next to him, watches as he itches at his shoulder, the one with the burn scar. The image is seared into Dream’s mind, along with all the other scars over George’s body that tell a story of survival.

“That’s no good,” Dream tells him, knocking their shoulders together. George pulls his hand away guiltily, like he knows he shouldn’t be itching at it. He probably does know. Of course he knows. “Did you get it on video, at least?”

“Yeah,” George laughs. “I did, actually. I went back and watched it later just to see if it looked cool.”

“Did it?”

“No. I looked like a fucking idiot.”

Dream wheezes, and George smiles in a way that crinkles his eyes, lets him beam, and Dream thinks, even with all of space in front of them, George is prettier than every star in the sky.

“Okay,” Quackity says as he storms into the conference room. Phil is at the head of the table, as always. Fundy is actually sitting down today, which is vaguely surprising. Wilbur looks at him like he’s crazy, and he might be. There’s a good chance of it. Bad looks like he’s half-asleep. Quackity doesn’t blame him- it’s five in the morning, after all. “Jack faxed the shit over this morning, and I think we’ve got it.”

It’s been three days since he arrived in Houston, and he’s been working out of a makeshift desk set up in Wilbur’s office, running back and forth between various departments, spending nearly every hour of the day on phone calls with people back at JPL. There are a million things rushing through his mind, probabilities and equations and calculations, and the only sleep he’s gotten has been on a couch in the office of Tubbo Underscore himself. Upon asking why Tubbo Underscore has a couch in his office, Tubbo just gave him a look that he was much too tired to interpret.

The problem dragging him all the way from Pasadena, of course, is the fact that *Hermes* has now been through unplanned breaches twice. Going through an unplanned breach once is incredibly bad for a ship, and doing it twice in a span of less than a week is even worse. After running internal checks that they were able to do from JPL, they found a few problems that the crew probably would have missed and wouldn’t have known to fix.

“Great,” Phil says. “Run it by us.”

Quackity slams his briefcase down on the table, flips it open, and throws a stack of papers onto the table. They scatter, and Wilbur catches one as it nearly flies past. He takes a look at it, then raises one eyebrow.

“I don’t know if I like this, Quackity,” he says.

“Well, it’s what you get,” Quackity snaps. “I have been working for three days straight on solutions, Wilbur, this is stuff they need to fix now. Like, right now. Or else they might all die, right now.”

Phil mutters something about the risks of space travel. Bad sends him a harsh look.

“All I’m saying is Techno knows what he was signing the crew up for,” Phil says, raising his hands. “Obviously I don’t want them to die, but they all know that death is one of the risks. As it is with every mission.”

“Well, we want to prevent that,” Quackity huffs. “Hence our solutions. We just need the Director’s approval and then we’re patching them up.”

He looks at Phil expectantly.

“What?” Phil asks. “Yes, of course I approve-”

“You’re not even going to look it over?” Wilbur says.

“Quackity, can you have someone send me a summary?” Fundy asks politely. “Or would you like to appear on CNN tonight.”

“I’ll pass,” Quackity grimaces. “I’ll have someone write something up. Thanks for the approval, Phil, we’ll get going on that-” He starts gathering the papers and shoving them haphazardly into the briefcase. Wilbur’s protests die out as he realizes it’s pointless. Quackity is running on six different energy drinks that Karl brought him and pure adrenaline. He’s a man that’s looked God in the eyes and gotten God to look away first.

He storms out of the conference room as quickly as he stormed in, dialing up Jack Manifold as he goes.

“Hey, it’s me,” he says. “I’m flying back to Pasadena in an hour. We’ve got the go-ahead. Send the fixes up.”

The crew hasn’t been able to watch any logs due to the fact that they got a video message from Quackity explaining several things that had gone wrong, and spending the next week fixing the things that had gone wrong. Now, however, it’s Mission Day 779- a hundred and eighty-one days

until home- and they're finally able to settle in and watch the next batch of logs. George is busy recording a new one, promising they'll be able to find him in the gym when they're through so they can have their nightly debriefing before going to bed.

They're in pretty much the same position as they were the last time they did this- Dream is in the middle, Sapnap and Puffy on either side, Niki and Techno on the edges of the couch. The ship is finally, hopefully fixed, unless Quackity decides to tell them something else has gone wrong (although there's still a fair bit that's up to chance- Dream just hopes they don't have to depressurize the ship again).

And now, George is in front of them, on the computer screen. Dream leans forward and presses play, and his voice booms out of Puffy's laptop speakers.

"Sol 25," he says. "Remember those old math questions from algebra? Water is entering a container at a certain rate and leaving at a different rate and you need to figure out when it'll be empty? Maybe that was calculus. Anyways, that concept is critical to the "George Davidson doesn't die" project I'm working on."

Laughs from the crew. Dream's heart yearns.

George goes on to detail the math about calories and soil and Dream pays attention to every word, even if he doesn't retain a lot of it, obsessed with the way George moves, the way he breathes, the way he exists so continually even with everything against him.

"Sol 26. A very productive day, if I do say so myself. I've got a shit ton of soil in the Hab so I can grow my damn potatoes. Mars is a lot nicer when it's not trying to kill you, I think. I've also started modifying our rover so it's able to get me over to the Ares IV landing site.

"And... I miss my crew. Jesus, I miss them so much. I miss Sapnap's stupid jokes, I miss Puffy and Niki's mothering, I miss Techno's death stares, I miss Dream's... I miss Dream. I miss them so fucking much, and I can't even imagine what they're going through, thinking they left me for dead here. I can practically imagine them losing it when they find out I made it twenty sols past what they thought. At least. I'm planning on making it a lot longer."

Dream takes a moment to look around at the rest of the crew- Niki and Puffy are both red in the face and teary-eyed. George's voice broke right when he said he misses the crew, and God if that didn't break Dream's heart. Techno is stoic as ever, but his foot has started tapping against the ground. Sapnap is wringing his hands. And Dream... Dream doesn't know what he's feeling.

He's so, so fucking glad George is alive.

"Sol 30. I have an idiotically dangerous plan for getting the water I need. And boy, do I mean *dangerous*. But I don't have much of a choice. So."

He talks about his plan for creating water- which is really, really fucking dangerous. Dream's literally a chemist, and he doesn't know if he would ever try anything George is doing. But then again, like video-George said, he doesn't have much of a choice.

On Sol 33, George blows himself up. The whole crew gasps when it happens, when George goes flying back in a burst of flames, lands on the hard dirt, and doesn't get up. Dream leans forward on the edge of his seat, ready to beg, plead for George to be okay. He doesn't move for nearly ten minutes, and when he finally gets up, the first thing he does is rub his head. The second thing he does is look down at his left shoulder, previously hidden from the camera.

It looks horrible- Puffy gags and looks away, and Sapnap flinches back. Even Techno winces. Dream can't tear his eyes away, and he knows Niki's bound to have seen worse, being surgically trained. The skin is red and raw, his shirt burned away, and there are several loud curses. George gets up and makes his way over to the camera, and the burn just looks worse up close, and the video cuts. Dream can sense the unease rolling off the other four in waves, and he leans forward to pause the video.

"I think that's enough for today," he says, and the others nod in agreement. Dream is the first to leave again, instantly going to the gym. George is standing up today, just watching again, and Dream clears his throat to let him know he's there. George doesn't turn around, not until Dream wraps both arms around his waist and pulls him in against his chest. He rests his head on George's left shoulder and hums something softly.

"Hey," George laughs, sounding a bit surprised. "You good?"

"We just watched you get blown up," Dream says, and he presses a kiss to where the scar is through George's shirt. "That looked awful."

"It hurt like a bitch," George says with a laugh. "But I was okay. You haven't even seen the worst of it yet."

“Oh, I’m sure,” Dream says. “What other stupid chemistry things did you do?”

“So many, Dream,” George tells him earnestly, twisting in his grip so they’re facing each other. Dream keeps his hands on George’s hips, and George wraps his arms around Dream’s neck. They’re close, so close, and Dream’s about to lean in when-

“Ready for debrief?” Sapnap’s voice yells down the entrance. “We’re meeting up on the bridge.”

“Sounds good!” George yells, pulling back. Dream retracts his own arms and rubs the back of his neck awkwardly. George clears his throat. “We should probably-”

“Yeah,” Dream agrees, all too quickly. George is red in the face, and Dream’s sure he isn’t much better. Great. George brushes past him and squeezes his upper arm as he does, and it’s all terribly domestic, and it just makes the blush worse.

Stupid feelings, Dream thinks. Stupid George making him feel things. Stupid face for getting red when George makes him feel things.

The debrief is short- ten minutes, maybe, just going over the last few fixes they’re making to the ship. Techno sends them all off to bed, and Dream tries not to stare longingly at George and Niki heading down to the medbay, just like he’s done every other night. Sapnap pats his shoulder and then forcibly drags him down to their rooms.

Time marches onward. They make a goal to watch one sol’s worth of video logs every day after George reluctantly tells them, red in the face, that he doesn’t like being alone for long periods of time. Long periods of time being more than the ten minutes it takes him to record a log and then wander the ship for a bit waiting for them to be done.

Every day, Niki reports better and better news regarding George’s health- it’s with beams from the whole crew that they hit the six-week mark and George’s ribs are declared officially healed. They paste the X-rays up on the wall of the Rec, and George stares at them with tears in his eyes for nearly five minutes.

“I’m going to be okay,” he says when he turns back to Dream, wonder clear on his face, and Dream hugs him tightly and doesn’t let go.

George pulls back from Dream's embrace, grin still clear, tears gone from his eyes. He's allowed to sleep in his own room now, which is going to be nice, probably. He's sure Niki is looking forward to going back to her own bed and not sleeping down in the medbay.

When it comes time for bed, he feels overjoyed going down to the hallway of rooms with them, rather than splitting off from the group. He sits in the bed he hasn't slept in in months and stares at the wall, then lays down and stares at the ceiling, and eventually, he thinks, he falls asleep.

And when he wakes up-

When he wakes up, it's dark, and there's a thrumming of something that he can't place. And he's in a familiar bed and there's no one else around and he's *alone*. He's alone, and he reaches a hand up to his ribs and they're sore, and he looks around wildly and it's dark but there's no one there, he's in a small space and he's alone, he's alone, he's alone-

He doesn't even realize he's screaming until someone's knocking on the door, and by that point he's recognizing that he's not back on Mars, but he also isn't calming down, his breathing is getting faster and it feels like there's a weight pushing down on his chest, and he pries at his shirt to try and get it off but it won't go. It won't go, and he's sitting there with tears in his eyes in the dark clawing at his own skin trying to make it stop, and then there's the vague sound of a door being slammed open and a weight sinking down on the bed in front of him.

He scrambles back out of pure habit, just because he knows he's having a panic attack and he doesn't want anyone getting near him, he has no idea how he'd react. But the weight on the bed isn't leaving and neither is the weight on his chest, and there's light being thrown into the room from the hallway and shadows pacing back and forth and a soothing voice telling him to breathe, George, breathe-

He breathes. Once, then twice, and then he keeps breathing. His hands are still tangled in his shirt, still trying to push the weight off of him, and that same soothing voice is asking if he can touch him, and George must mumble out a yes because there are calloused hands on his slowly pulling them away. George follows his arms and collides with something solid, and warm arms wrap around his body and pull him in close and George sobs out the rest of his panic attack into the shirt of his savior.

He has no idea how much time has passed when his sobs slowly begin to fade out, replaced by a singular hiccup and a few more deep breaths. He knows it's Dream that's here with him, of course it's Dream, who would it be other than Dream? There's another hand on his back, smaller than

Dream's, and he glances back to see Puffy. She smiles at him reassuringly. He looks up to the doorway to see Sapnap leaning against the frame, watching them carefully, no judgement in his eyes.

"Did I wake all of you?" George croaks out, and he cringes at the way his voice cracks.

"Yeah," Sapnap says. "It's okay, though. I don't know if any of us were asleep anyways."

"Niki almost passed out on Techno, so he made her go back to bed," Puffy says. "All that-"

"Medbay," George finishes. "Right. You guys can go. I'm okay."

"No way," Dream murmurs, lips pressed against George's hair. "Techno said we were gonna talk about sleeping arrangements in the morning. You're not sleeping alone again."

Puffy gets up and heads out wordlessly, and Sapnap closes the door behind them as they leave Dream and George alone together.

"I'm okay, Dream," George says. "Really."

Dream shakes his head. "Tell me about it. What happened?"

He's not letting go, and George doesn't want him to. He takes a few more deep breaths.

"It was- it was dark. And I was alone. And I thought, for a second, that I was- that I was back there. And that was enough to make me freak out."

"And that's valid," Dream says. "But you also understand that I'm not going to let that happen to you again."

"My hero," George mumbles in a way he intends to be sarcastic, but ends up coming off as genuine. Dream rubs his back a few more times. "Can I go back to sleep now?"

“Sure,” Dream says, looking around. “I’ll drag a pillow and blanket in from my room, one sec-”

“You’re not sleeping on the floor,” George says scathingly. “If you’re so insistent on sleeping in the same room as me, we might as well share a bed.”

Thank God it’s dark, so Dream can’t see how red his face goes. Dream just mumbles something noncommittal, keeps his arms wrapped around George, and lays them both down.

“Under the blanket, Dream,” George says, rolling his eyes. Dream shuffles awkwardly, keeping both arms wrapped around him, and God, if this is what happens every night, there’s no way George is going to be able to keep his feelings inside while the mission is still ongoing.

He doesn’t know when he falls asleep, but this time when he wakes up, there’s still that warm body beneath his own, arms wrapped around him, keeping him safe, reminding him he’s alive. His head is resting on Dream’s chest, and he looks up to see his friend still out cold. His heart is practically singing.

Dream wakes up shortly after, and they make their way to the Rec together. Everyone else has already gathered, and Techno gives them a strong look as they enter.

“For the sake of George’s mental health, I’m going to allow you two to continue sleeping in the same bed,” Techno tells them. “But if I hear about anything going on-”

“Oh my God,” Dream mutters, bright red.

“There’s nothing *going on*,” George says, eyes wide, glancing around. “Technoblade, you’ve gotta be *kidding* me-”

Techno’s stoic face breaks into a grin. “I’m just teasing you. God, you’re so easy. Nah, it’s fine, I don’t care. Just don’t tell the people at NASA.”

Jesus, George thinks. It’s going to be a long couple of months.

“Mission Day 813,” George announces to his laptop. He’s in his room, there’s a combination of his and Dream’s things strewn about on the floor, and there are a hundred and forty-seven days until home. “I don’t really have anything to talk about today. But, if my timing is correct, the crew is on Sol 66. Which I’m pretty sure is when I first decided to do the Asteria missions.

“Oh, God. Oh my God, I first confessed being in love with Dream that day. One second-”

He pauses the video log and practically sprints down the hall to the entrance. He propels himself across the bridge as quickly as possible and storms his way into the Rec just in time to hear his own voice saying, “I can talk about my relationships with the crew. God, I love the crew.” He slams Puffy’s laptop shut and the whole crew boos at him.

“Come on, George,” Sapnap says. “Let us hear you be sappy!”

“Nope,” George tells them. “No can-do. It’s all terribly depressing. I can give you a recap, if you want.”

“Get off the stage!” Puffy calls through cupped hands, and Niki swats her.

“No, I want to see this,” Techno says, leaning forward. “Go on, George. Give us the recap.”

“Niki as my fellow European pog,” George says, counting off on his fingers. “Puffy’s a bitch and I like her so much. I hate you, Sapnap, God you’re awful. Techno is a good commander. Dream sucks.”

“I hate that, actually,” Sapnap tells him.

“I liked it,” Puffy shrugs. “I think it was accurate. We won’t watch the rest of this one if you don’t want us to, George.”

“I don’t want you to,” George says flatly.

“Fine, then,” Techno says, not upset. “There wasn’t a video for 67, so we’ll skip to 68.”

George thinks hard about the Asteria missions.

“You’re not going to like that one, either,” he says.

“What do you mean?” Techno asks.

“That’s when I decided to dig up the RTG.”

“You *what?* ” the Commander all-but screeches, and George is already making his way back to the bridge. Crisis averted. He should probably go talk to his video log about that.

Time marches on. Sometimes the crew talks to him about things that happen in the video logs- never anything detrimental, just things. He keeps track of where they are, tries to remember what was happening when. On the day that he made contact with NASA, Dream finds him in the gym and picks him up and spins him around without saying anything about it.

“I’m so proud of you,” Sapnap tells him earnestly at one point, and George nearly bursts into tears.

He keeps up a steady stream of emails with people back on Earth. He and Wilbur bicker non-stop through their communication, just being friends, and it feels good to not have his life on the line. He ignores emails from people he doesn’t know just because he gets too stressed when he thinks about answering them. He does talk to Fundy about how he’s doing, sometimes, and knows that it probably ends up on the news every night.

On Mission Day 860, one hundred days to home, they have a special congratulatory dinner. A hundred days left. A hundred days and they’re back on Earth. God, he can’t wait. They eat like kings (or at least, space kings), and they gather in the Rec for a movie night afterward. George sits around while they watch their video log for the day- it’s a short one, just George talking about his second potato harvest. Part of him misses his Martian-grown potatoes. Part of him never wants to even think about a potato ever again.

Once they’re done with their movie- *Interstellar*, of all things, featuring a guy trapped in space on a

planet trying to kill him, how fitting- George and Dream head back to their room. Because it's their room, now, not George's room. They each boot up their laptops to check on any last-minute emails, and George sees one from a NASA address he doesn't recognize.

He reads it. Then he reads it again. Then, with shaking hands, he starts typing out a response.

TO: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

FROM: Martian Investigations Committee (mic@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: A Few Questions

Hello, Dr. Davidson,

As you may be aware, there was an investigation launched as to how your abandonment on Mars went about. We were put on hold for a while during the period of time while communication with you was paused, and we wanted to give you ample time to recover on Hermes so as to properly answer our questions.

If we email you some thoughts, we would like you to respond promptly. All this goes to ensuring that something like what happened to you, will never happen again.

Best,

MIC

Martian Investigations Committee

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Chapter End Notes

come vibe with me on [twitter](#)

this fic's [spotify playlist](#)

comments/kudos/subs/etc are always always always appreciated!!!! <3

Selene

Chapter Notes

I'M BACK

sorry for being gone for so long- things got insanely crazy with exams and karlnap week and life in general. from here on out there'll be weekly updates until the end of my school year (about three weeks), and probably back to our regular monday & thursday schedule after that.

that being said, i did not proofread this chapter, as with a lot of these chapters. please do not yell at me for any mistakes. i am very small. just pretend i do not make them

most of all, enjoy!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

TO: Martian Investigations Committee (mic@nasa.gov)

FROM: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: RE: A Few Questions

Sure thing.

Only, I'm pretty sure I told Wilbur (that'd be Dr. Soot to you) that I wasn't going to help you guys with your little witch-hunt. I'm not going to incriminate my crew.

Best,

Dr. Davidson

TO: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

FROM: Martian Investigations Committee (mic@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: RE: RE: A Few Questions

Dear Dr. Davidson,

As you may be aware, we were not pleased with this response. As a NASA employee, it is your duty to assist in any investigative actions if it is asked of you, as indicated by your employment contract. Your position may be terminated if you refuse to cooperate.

Additionally, we know you view this as a “witch-hunt”. Please keep in mind that your answers may lead us away from your crew. Keep that in consideration when responding to future emails.

Best,

MIC

Martian Investigations Committee

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

TO: Martian Investigations Committee (mic@nasa.gov)

FROM: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: RE: RE: RE: A Few Questions

...fine. I'll answer your questions. Send them over when you have them.

George.

TO: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

FROM: Martian Investigations Committee (mic@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: RE: RE: RE: RE: A Few Questions

Dr. Davidson,

We look forward to your cooperation on this matter.

Best,

MIC

Martian Investigations Committee

National Aeronautic and Space Administration

“Who are you emailing?” Dream asks. “I want to go to bed.”

George is sitting at the desk, refreshing the page over and over again. No new emails pop up in his inbox- the MIC is done for the night.

“No one,” he says, turning back. Dream is laying on his stomach on the bed, his own laptop closed in front of him. He’s looking at George expectantly, like he knows George is lying. George shrugs and hits the lights, then makes his way over to the bed. Dream rolls to the side, letting George climb in next to him. Like every other night, they don’t touch. Like every other night, they’ll wake up pressed together, limbs tangled, and they’ll pretend it doesn’t mean something more.

That night, George dreams. He dreams that he’s back on Mars, situated in the Hab, only this time, the rest of the crew is still with him. The MAV has tipped and they’re all trapped on Mars, but it’s okay, because they have each other.

There’s a whirlwind of emotions. Of them working together on how to figure out the growing of the potatoes, them working together to make sure things don’t blow up, them working together, and being together, and even though death is inevitable, there’s a feeling of togetherness that strikes longing through George’s heart.

And then he wakes up, and he is almost worried for a moment, until he remembers there is a warm body next to him and they are safe on *Hermes* and they are heading for home. He sits up in an attempt to calm his racing heart, and he doesn’t even know why it’s racing, he just knows he needs to walk around, or something.

His sudden movement causes Dream to awaken, and he's almost thankful for it. Dream sits up next to him and blinks at him through the dark.

"You alright?" he asks, and his voice is so soft that George wants to cry.

"I'm fine," George replies. His voice does not shake.

"Nightmare again?"

"No," George responds, because it wasn't really a nightmare, not with the whole crew together. He doesn't know how the dream ends. He doesn't know if he wants to. "Just a weird dream. I might go for a walk."

"Okay," Dream responds, pulling the covers aside. "I'll come with you. Or do you want to clear your head?"

"You can come with me," George answers. Dream smiles and stands up, already prepared, already having known what George's answer would be. They make their way out of the room and to the Rec, not really knowing where else to go. They stare out the window, standing next to each other silently, so close that their fingertips brush, neither one of them daring to reach out.

"I've missed you," Dream says eventually, quietly.

"I've been here for a while," George responds. He's confused, because Dream has had all the time in the world to miss him, but he's back now. He's here.

"I know," Dream replies, and their fingers brush again. "I just... I've missed your laugh. And your smile. The way your eyes crinkle. The way you tease me for my wheeze."

"Dream," George says.

"I've missed your whining. I know I make fun of you for it, but I had no idea I'd miss it until you were gone. I missed how smart you are, your ability to come up with solutions to every possible problem, how fast your mind works, how good you are in emergency situations. I've missed

everything about you, George.”

He’s still staring out the window, and carefully, George tangles their fingers together and gives Dream’s hand a squeeze.

“I’ve missed you too,” he says softly, and Dream finally turns and looks at him, only it isn’t Dream. It’s a blank mask, a featureless face, just a mimic of the smiley-face tattoo Dream has, staring back at him. The mouth opens and it’s something out of a horror movie, and the thing laugh and says,

“Did you really think he’d say that?”

And George drops not-Dream’s hand and backs away, and he finds himself falling into the vast expanse of space, and the thing leaps after him. It’s crying out gleefully, screeching, shrieking, and George tries to swim through the stars but finds asteroids blocking his path at every turn.

“Did you really think he’d *love* you? After everything? You’re *broken*, Georgie!” The thing still has Dream’s voice, in some weird, contorted way, and George can feel his heart stuttering and stopping and he’s in space, he can’t breath, the shrieking is getting louder and he can’t breathe, can’t feel, he’s frozen in time and he’s floating, floating, away from the ship-

and then he’s crash-landing on Mars, in the dust, and when he sits up he’s in an EVA suit and there’s a communications antennae piercing through his biomonitor and into his stomach, and this time when he gets up and stumbles toward the Hab he falls, doesn’t make it, he dies there under the hot Martian sun, and he waits and he waits and he waits, and eventually astronauts come and they find his body, there in the dirt, and one of the astronauts takes off his helmet and it’s Dream, crying out in agony, and then-

and then George wakes up with a gasp. Dream’s arms are tangled around him, holding him there, and he nearly falls out of the bed in his struggle to get away. His breathing quickens and he puts a hand on his chest, and Dream sits up, blinking sleep out of his eyes.

“Hey,” he says softly. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” George chokes out. “I think I’m going to go for a walk.”

“Do you want me to come with you?” Dream asks, reaching for a corner of the blankets.

“No,” George says, all too quickly. “I need some time to myself, I think.”

“Okay,” Dream says with a nod. “Okay. Take your time. See you soon.”

“Yeah,” George agrees, already half-out the door. “See you soon.”

He doesn't go to the Rec. He goes to the gym, where he sits on the ground for hours, staring out the window. No one disturbs him, no one comes looking for him, he just sits there and stares at the space passing them by, and it feels like they aren't moving. Like the window is just a screen, displaying stars moving by, and they're completely stationary.

George decides he doesn't like the feeling. He doesn't leave.

Puffy wakes up with a yawn. She's been much too tired these days, in all honesty. Something about space is starting to get to her. She loves it, certainly, but she misses Earth, her family, her job in Mission Control. This is her third time in space, after a brief stint on the Moon and an even briefer one on the ISS, and she thinks she's had enough of it to last a lifetime.

She knocks on Niki's door to wake her up, like she usually does. She leans on the opposite wall while she waits for the other woman to get up, and eventually, Niki opens the door and joins her. They usually eat breakfast together, and then run their morning checks. Niki does her science tasks, Puffy makes sure everything on the ship is running smoothly, and then they go to the gym together until lunch.

Today, Niki's supposed to be doing physical exams on all of them. She tells Puffy about it as they make their way to the kitchen for breakfast, and Puffy laughs at all the right times and smiles all the rest of it. She adores Niki, and she knows Niki adores her too.

They eat breakfast together, laughing through their food. Technoblade joins them halfway through, like he usually does, already completely put-together and prepared for the day. They split up when they're done eating, Niki heading for the medbay and Puffy for the reactor, just to do her checks. She runs through them, hoping to catch a little bit of physical activity before her exam, and makes

her way down to the gym.

She is not expecting to find George asleep on the gym floor, resting up against the window. She sighs and wonders if he was sleep-walking, carefully approaching so she doesn't startle him. She crouches down next to him and reaches out, shaking his shoulder.

He startles awake, limbs flying, and she falls back so that she doesn't get hit. It takes him a moment to recognize where he is, but Puffy can see the moment clarity overtakes his gaze, and he smiles sheepishly at her.

"Hey," he says. "Did I fall asleep?"

"Yeah," she tells him. "You wanna talk about why you're down here?"

"Bad dream," he replies. "Er- not Dream, like, a nightmare-"

"I got it," Puffy laughs. "What happened? Or would you rather not talk about it?"

"I don't know," George shrugs. He swivels his body so he's facing the window again, and she scoots forward to sit next to him. She watches as he reaches a hand out and places it against the window. "I like the feeling of it. The hum. Reminds me we're still alive."

Puffy places her own hand against the window. Indeed, she can feel the thrumming of the ship, the churning of the engines, the steady beat that indicates movement. She pulls back, and George mimics the movement. She waits for him to speak.

"At first we were all on Mars," he starts. "And we were all trapped. And then I woke up, and Dream was there- at least, I thought I woke up. But Dream and I walked to the Rec and then-"

George cuts himself off. She nods for him to continue.

"He turned into this... this *monster*," George says. "And then I was falling through space, and he was chasing me, and I was back on Mars and I was outside the Hab at the beginning of it all and I was dying, and then I just had to lay there as Dream found my body, and-"

He cuts himself off again. Puffy holds out her arms, and he sinks into them. She tightens her grip and his body shakes, and she thinks he might be crying, but she doesn't say anything about it. She just holds him, and eventually, Dream makes his way down to the gym. He looks frantic, like he's been searching for something, and his shoulders sag when he makes eye contact with Puffy.

"Hey," she murmurs softly, turning away from Dream to look down at George. "Dream's here." She glances back up. Dream hasn't moved. He gestures toward the bridge, asking if he needs to leave- she purses her lips and shakes her head. She jerks toward the window, and Dream starts forward instantly.

George pulls back, and his eyes are red. Dream pauses when they make eye contact, then continues forward.

"Oh, baby," he says, reaching out, and George bursts into tears again as he lunges forward, clinging to Dream's chest like a lifeline. Dream sinks them down to the floor, and Puffy reaches out so she can rub George's back. She makes eye contact with Dream, who looks at her questioningly.

"Nightmare," she mouths at him. George sniffles, then pulls back.

"Sorry," he says, wiping his eyes. "I don't know what came over me-"

"Don't apologize," Dream says. "Come on, do you wanna go back to bed for a bit?"

"Yeah," George agrees, and Puffy watches as Dream helps him up and they walk toward the exit together. "Thank you, Puffy," George says, turning back. Puffy just salutes and waves, watching them leave.

She checks the time. Damn. So much for getting some exercise in. She gives them enough time to get back to their room before making her way to the bridge, floating past Sapnap on the way.

"What happened?" he asks. "Nightmare?"

She nods, and he nods back, going for the Rec. She makes her way to the medbay to find Niki

waiting, spinning back and forth in her chair. She stops and blushes when she sees that Puffy's entered, and Puffy grins at her.

"Hey," she says. "Sorry, I was busy helping George." She leaves the rest of it unsaid; Niki picks up on it anyways.

"Nightmares?" Niki asks, and Puffy nods.

"They went back to bed," she says. "I dunno if you're gonna get him away from Dream for the rest of the day."

Because of course, George and Dream are oblivious, but the rest of the crew is not. They all see how George clings to Dream like a lifeline. They all see how he's the most relaxed, the most comfortable around Dream, how Dream's the one that has the easiest time getting him to calm down, getting him to open up.

Puffy, especially, isn't blind. She doesn't joke about being Dream's mother for nothing- she's the shoulder Dream cried on when he was missing George, after they found out he was alive. She spent countless nights awake in bed with him, letting him sob in her arms, trying her best to console him. She knows how deeply Dream's love for George runs, and she's made the assumption, throughout everything, that George's love runs just as deeply.

"They'll be okay," Niki says with a soft sigh. "Some day."

"Some day," Puffy agrees. "Let's get this check-up on with, Doc."

Bad slams the printed-out copy of the email onto Wilbur's desk. Wilbur sighs and looks up into Bad's furious eyes.

"What the muffin is this?" Bad asks. He's put up with a lot of crap throughout all of this- not being able to tell the crew about George, about the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver, not letting them make decisions for themselves that they're perfectly capable of making. But this-

“I don’t know, Bad,” Wilbur says. He sounds exhausted. Bad almost feels bad, but he knows for this to get through to George, Wilbur would’ve had to sign off on it. “What is it?”

“It’s a message from the *em-aye-see*,” he says, making sure to put emphasis on each syllable. “The Martian Investigations Committee. George forwarded it to me.”

“George forwarded it to you?” Wilbur asks, slightly surprised. “Why? This is highly confidential-”

“Because I’m his *friend*,” Bad stresses. “And because he’s confused, and a little scared, and a lot angry. Why would you sign off on this? You know that his mental state is still questionable and we can’t assess him until they’re back on Earth.”

“They wanted to do it the second he was back on the ship,” Wilbur says. “The second he made it to Schiaparelli, actually. Be glad I didn’t let them.”

“Thank you for not doing it then,” Bad huffs. “But you shouldn’t have done it now, either. This is just going to put more stress on the entire crew-”

“I know, Bad,” Wilbur says patiently. “But what else would you have me do? Wait until they’re back on Earth, then throw them into a military trial with no warning? At least now they’re prepared.”

“You know what’s going to happen, don’t you?” Bad asks. “If Technoblade goes down, that whole crew is going to go down with him. *George* is going to go down with him. Willingly. The people love the Ares III crew. What do you think this is going to do for NASA’s public image? If George testifies against the prosecutors and they find Techno guilty anyways? It’ll destroy us, it’ll destroy you, and Fundy’s *not* going to be pleased, I’ll tell you that.”

“You know,” Wilbur says thoughtfully. “You’re the second person to tell me that the whole crew will go down with their Commander. And I do believe you. And I understand, I really do. But listen, Bad. Off the record-”

He glances toward the door. Bad huffs again.

“Off the record,” Wilbur repeats. “I’m going to do everything in my power to make sure that the whole crew gets off scott-free. I don’t care about mutinies, I don’t care about any of it. I love

Technoblade like a brother, and if they do find him guilty-”

Wilbur takes a deep breath.

“If they do find him guilty, I’m quitting my fucking job. And I’m assuming you will be, too.”

“Oh, of course I will,” Bad snorts. “I’m just surprised you’re doing the same.”

Wilbur shrugs. “I’m on your side, Bad,” he says. “We want the same thing. That crew here safe, and that crew able to live out the rest of their lives in peace and happiness.”

“I suppose so,” Bad agrees. “Well- make sure they know that they’ve got the whole world watching them, and that we’re not on their side.”

“They know,” Wilbur laughs. “Trust me, they know.”

Bad nods, picks the printed-off copy of the email off Wilbur’s desk, and strides out of the room. Glancing down at his phone, he dials a number that he doesn’t dial that often.

“Has Sapnap said anything about an investigation?” he asks the man on the other end of the line. The response is affirmative. He thanks Karl and hangs up the phone.

So none of the crew is telling each other about the emails. God, he thinks. For a group that’s practically a family, they can be terrible at communication.

TO: Dr. George Davidson (georgedavidson@nasa.gov)

FROM: Martian Investigations Committee (mic@nasa.gov)

SUBJECT: Your Cooperation Is Appreciated

Dr. Davidson,

We have created a short list of questions for you to answer. We will ask one at a time out of courtesy, so as not to overwhelm you, beginning with an easy one.

What happened on Mars leading up to your abandonment?

Best,

MIC

Martian Investigations Committee

National Aeronautic and Space Administration

George reads the email at least four times before he nearly throws his laptop across the room. Instead, he stands up, slams his laptop shut, and storms down to the medbay.

He knows the rest of the crew is watching their video log for the day- he's pretty sure it's just him shitting on NASA. He's not worried about it.

Once he's in the medbay, he turns on Niki's computer and types in his login and password, then starts a new video log.

"Mission Day 861," he announces. "God fuck, I hate politicians.

"Now, George, you may be saying. Doesn't *everyone* hate politicians? And the answer to that is yes! But the main thing is- the main thing is I hate it when people only do things for politics. And it's not exactly politics, but it certainly seems like it. Because this stupid Martian Investigations Committee is trying to- to *manipulate* me into indicting Technoblade, which obviously, I'm not going to do.

"And I'm not fucking stupid! I know when I'm being manipulated! They start with a subject like *Your Cooperation Is Appreciated* and then go on to say shit like 'oh, we don't want to overwhelm

you, so *just for you* we're only gonna ask one question at a time,' and then they ask me how I was abandoned.

"Which I've stressed multiple times! In statements I know that Fundy has released! That I *was not* abandoned. They didn't abandon me. They left me because they rightfully believed I was dead! They saved themselves, *as they should have*, and-

"God, I'm sorry. I'm just very pissed. I'm sure someday when someone is watching this they're going to think I'm overreacting, but I'm so, so tired. I'm so angry. I just want to go back to Earth and cuddle with my cat, and instead I've got the MIC out here trying to get me to turn on my own crew.

"And that's another thing! I haven't even gotten any *names*, or anything, they just sign every email the same way with their department title, and it's vaguely annoying, because I don't even have a person in particular I can imagine punching in the face!

"Alright. Alright. Alyssa wouldn't want me getting all worked up. She'd tell me to do some breathing exercises. I'm going to do some fucking breathing exercises. Jesus Christ."

George stops the video and leans back in the swivel chair. He takes a few deep breaths in and out, and eventually, a pair of feet hit the ground behind him.

"Hey," Niki's voice says quietly. He turns around. She's fidgeting with her hands, smiling sheepishly. "I heard some of that, at the end."

"Oh," he says, rubbing the back of his neck. "Yeah, I- I wasn't too pleased."

"I've gotten emails from them, too," Niki confesses. "I just haven't responded to them yet."

George laughs. "You're braver than I am," he tells her. She shakes her head, still smiling.

"I don't think so," she says. "I'm just- fed up. With people thinking we aren't a crew. A family."

"Yeah," George says, nodding. Because that's what they are. A family. They can handle

themselves. They trust each other to the ends of the universe. They don't need an Investigations Committee ruining all that. "If they end up blaming Techno, I'm going to take all of NASA down with me."

"I'm sure you will," Niki laughs. "You'd be the one that would be able to do it, too, I'm sure."

He thinks about it, and realizes he could probably do it, if he really tried. He's the famous one, after all.

"Has anyone else gotten the emails?" he asks curiously. He's certainly glad he isn't the only one.

"Puffy has, I know that," Niki says. "Because we're boycotting our responses together. I'm not sure about the others, I'd have to ask them. Have you responded?"

"I told them I wouldn't cooperate and then they mostly guilted me into it," George admits. "Said if I helped lead them away from Techno, he wouldn't be indicted. Have they ever signed your emails with an actual name?"

"Never," Niki says, shaking her head. "Always just their department title."

"Same here. God, I hate them, and I've never even met them."

"You and me both, George."

They talk for a while longer before George heads off to bed, meeting Dream in the bedroom. His laptop is still sitting on the bed, untouched, from where he slammed it shut.

He thinks he's going to join Niki and Puffy in their boycotting of responding to the MIC, at least for a little bit.

"Hey," he says to Dream, once they're both ready for bed. "Have you gotten any emails from the Martian Investigations Committee?"

“Yeah,” Dream says. “Haven’t even opened it yet.”

They both laugh, Dream’s wheeze echoing throughout the room. That night, George doesn’t have nightmares. He dreams that they’re back on Earth at a beach, all six of them. They’re in their EVA suits, but they’re making sand castles and laughing and having a good time.

When he wakes up, Dream’s chest is pressed against his back, and their legs are tangled together. George leans back and lets Dream’s breath brush against the back of his neck. He rests there for a long moment, letting the universe settle around them, before he turns in Dream’s grip.

Dream is awake and staring down at him through sleepy eyes. George yelps and nearly rolls out of the bed, and Dream yells and startles forward to catch them. They both wind up on the floor, Dream barely holding himself up above George. There are footsteps from down the hall and someone knocks on the door, and they’re both laughing too hard to get up.

“You guys okay in there?” Techno’s voice calls out.

“We’re fine!” Dream wheezes, and they both burst into another round of laughter.

They go about the rest of the day as normal. Around lunch, George seeks out Sapnap. He finds him in the gym, running on the treadmill, and he slows to a stop when he sees George.

“Hey,” he says, wiping the sweat off his brow with a nearby towel. “What’s up?”

“Have you been getting emails?” George asks. “From the MIC?”

Sapnap pauses. “Did Karl tell you that?”

“No,” George says, shaking his head. “Why?”

“Cause I’ve been emailing him talking shit about them. You been getting them?”

“Everyone has, I think. I haven’t talked to Technoblade yet, but I’m assuming he got the same

thing. Probably a little meaner. They're going after him, Sap."

"I know." Sapnap throws on a sweatshirt and starts making his way toward the exit, and George follows.

"Have you responded to any of the emails?"

"Not yet. You?"

"Yeah. Wasn't too nice about it. They said if I cooperated they might steer away from the Commander."

"They're gonna be going after you the hardest," Sapnap tells him. "They think you're our weak link, but they don't know that you're the strongest of us all."

George smiles at Sapnap and follows him up to the bridge. They make their way to the kitchen, where pretty much everyone else is waiting, eating lunch.

"Commander," George says as he grabs his food. "Have you been getting emails from the MIC?"

Techno pauses mid-chew, swallows harshly, and nods. "They haven't been very nice," he admits.

"So we've all been getting them," George says. "Has anyone other than me responded?"

The crew mutters the negative.

"Let's keep it that way," Techno says. "We can deal with the consequences later. Say it went to spam, or something."

"They might come after me for that, Boss," Puffy says. "But it's a risk I'm willing to take."

“Alright. Only if it’s unanimous,” Techno says. “Like every decision we make.”

It’s unanimous. Of course it is.

It’s the next day that George calculates they’re going to be watching the airlock blow. He makes sure he’s nowhere near the Rec. Dream finds him anyways, silently wraps his arms around him and holds him tighter than usual that night.

The days continue. George responds to the emails from the MIC in short sentences, not giving them anywhere near what they want. He refuses to put any blame on Technoblade or even on JPL- he puts all of the blame on either Mars or himself.

As things get more hopeless on Mars, Dream holds him tighter at night. The day they watch the log where George talks about them coming back for him, George thinks Dream is about to kiss him. He doesn’t, but he comes close.

Soon, *Pathfinder* dies, and George ends up consoling Dream as he cries, talking about how George came so close and there was nothing they could do. George holds Dream tight and doesn’t let go, and he doesn’t let go, and he keeps not letting go. Soon, they’re counting down the days in single-digits. Soon, they’re about to pass by the Moon.

They all gather in the Rec to stand in front of the windows. George is the last one to enter the room, going to stand between Dream and Sapnap immediately. Niki and Puffy are already standing, fingertips brushing, pretending to ignore each other. Technoblade is crouched on the ground, eyeing their Moon in the distance.

“This is it,” Sapnap says.

“*Almost* it,” George reminds him.

Selene passes them by in all her giant glory. The six stand, watching, silent, in awe.

Two days until home.

[twitter](#)

this fic's [spotify playlist](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always always always appreciated! <3

Gaia

Chapter Notes

can i get a hell yeah for more no proofreading?

was gonna add more to this chapter and then decided to save it for the next chapter.
this one's a bit of a filler even though there's like. a major event happening lmao sorry
about that one

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The thing about the Moon is that, now that they're within visual range of it, they're also in visual range of Earth. She's big and blue and beautiful, and the six of them turn their gaze past the Moon to look at their home planet.

"We're almost there," George says breathlessly.

They're two days from home, which means they're got to start preparing. They know that *Hermes* was meant to last for the first five Ares missions, meaning she's still got one more lap left in her, but with the dangers of Airlock 1's inner door having been blasted to hell and back, it's unlikely she'll remain in use for much longer.

That's what engineers are for. They heard from Wilbur that *Hermes* is being sent into orbit, and another team of astronauts are going to be sent up with the materials necessary to fix her. NASA isn't ready to retire her yet, something that George is almost happy about. He's sentimental for this ship, and he knows the rest of the crew is as well.

Which means they're going to leave her better off than how they found her- or at least, as much as they can, with the amount of chaos they've put her through. They spend most of their second-to-last day in space doing a deep-clean of the *Hermes* with the materials they have on board, making sure everything they're capable of fixing is fixed, and just overall making sure it's clear to the next set of astronauts how well-loved she is.

That night, they gather in the Rec. There's no video log tonight, not when they're between their Moon and their home. Instead, they just sit with each other, gaze out the window, into the black void that has been their reality for so long.

"I can't believe we're actually leaving," Sapnap murmurs. It's none of their first time in space- they

each did tests before a mission as important as Ares- but they all think it might be their last. George, certainly, has had enough space to last a lifetime. He's going to miss it, certainly, but after everything, he's looking forward to living on Earth again. Maybe bullying Dream into settling down with him. That would be nice, he thinks.

"I can," Dream huffs. "I never want to see space again."

He's kidding, and they can all tell. When they were being briefed on everything before the mission started, the astronauts from the Ares I mission told them what the reality of an astronaut is- you miss space. You want to go back, and you know you can't. You're never going to experience anything like this ever again.

George has come to terms with that. He doesn't think he needs to experience anything like it again- hell, if he does, he'll probably be pissed. He's been through enough survival situations to last a lifetime.

"Come on," Puffy says lightly, teasingly. "You don't mean that."

"No," Dream concedes. "I don't."

There's silence amongst the crew for a long moment. They're all lost in thought. George takes the time to observe each of them individually, the way Niki and Puffy are leaning on each other, the way Sapnap's angled himself toward Earth, the way Techno's angled himself toward the space behind them. And Dream- Dream is angled toward George. George leans back on the couch, rests his head on Dream's chest, and sighs contentedly.

Yeah, he'll miss space. But it's this crew that made it incredible. It's this crew that he's survived for, and that he'll keep on living for. As long as he has them, it's all been worth it.

"So," Technoblade says eventually, clearing his throat. Lazily, George rolls so that he can face the Commander. Dream keeps a tight grip on his body so he doesn't fall. "We should probably go over some things."

"Like what?" Sapnap asks, reclining on the couch across from Dream and George. Techno is standing at the front of the room, near Puffy's computer, holding himself like he's about to give them some bad news.

“The MIC,” he says, and yeah, George thinks, that counts as bad news. “George is the only one that’s been answering questions, the rest of us have been ignoring their emails. There are going to be consequences for that.”

“Which is something we’ll deal with together,” Puffy says firmly. “We made that decision together, Techno, we’re not going to back out on you now.”

The rest of the crew is nodding in agreement. George smiles. God, he loves them.

“Alright,” Techno shrugs. “As long as we’re all aware- I’m likely going to be put on trial. There’s a good chance the rest of you will be, as well, or at least called to testify. I’ve been in contact with Wilbur- he says the MIC isn’t too pleased with us, but if we’re ignoring them, there’s not really anything they can do. They don’t like George’s answers, either.”

“That’s because they don’t blame you,” George snorts. “I always blame myself, or the terrain, or the situation. They want me to provide evidence that points back to you because they don’t know how to admit that sometimes there isn’t a person to blame and there isn’t any purpose for them to have been formed in the first place.”

“And most of NASA just doesn’t like you,” Sapnap points out.

“Sapnap!” Niki hisses, but Techno is laughing.

“No, he’s right,” Dream says. “Half of NASA thinks you’re a cocky asshole and always have been, and the other half worships the ground you walk on.”

“Okay, rub salt in the wound,” Puffy says, rolling her eyes, but Techno’s still laughing. They all know why it’s like that- Technoblade is very, very vocal in his criticisms of the way NASA has handled things in the past, especially when it’s related to the mistakes that have been made that could have easily been avoided.

“They’re right,” Techno agrees. “We just got unlucky and the MIC is formed of the ones that think I’m an asshole. We’ll be okay, though. We always are.”

“As long as they’re aware of the fact that we’re all going down with you,” George says. “We’re sticking by your side, Commander.”

Techno's laughter dies down and he nods at George gratefully. George offers a grim smile in response.

"Alright," he says. "Next order of business. Obviously, we've all been briefed on what's going to go down once we arrive back on Earth. It's likely they're going to hold each of us in their hospital for at least a week, considering the length of time we've been in space, and I know you're not going to like this, but they're probably not going to let us see each other."

Sapnap and Puffy both boo loudly. Niki, Dream, and George burst into laughter. Techno waves his hands for them to be quiet.

"I said you're not going to like it," the Commander yells over them. They quiet down to listen to him. Techno's lucky they all still respect him so much, George thinks, or they'd never get anything done. "There's a chance the five of us will be able to visit, but they're definitely going to keep George secluded."

"Oh, definitely," Niki says. "With all the tests they're going to run on him- sorry, George- we're going to be lucky if it's only a week before we get to see him."

"So what I'm hearing is we break into whatever secret room he's being kept in," Sapnap objects.

"I am not condoning this behavior," Techno responds. "However, if you do, make sure you please invite me."

George is honored, mostly. Going a week without seeing them is going to be absolute hell- in all honesty, if he has to spend a single night without Dream, he'll probably have another panic attack. Maybe then they'll let the crew visit.

"After that, there's going to be a lot of press, and I mean a *lot* of press. And then- out of pure curiosity, mostly- what are we going to do?"

And here he stops, looks out at all of them. George also glances around- they're all looking at each other. Everyone seems unsure.

“I’ve got a house in the suburbs waiting for me,” Sapnap says quietly. “Karl and I signed the mortgage electronically a few weeks ago. I was just... waiting to bring it up.”

There are congratulations from the crew, and Sapnap grins and waves them off before clearing his throat loudly.

“I know everyone probably... wants to stay near Houston, right? Keep working, and stuff?”

Affirmatives from the whole crew, except for George. He hasn’t actually thought about what he’d do- he figured he’d just go where Dream goes.

“Well, there are... there are a few homes up for sale in the neighborhood. It’s a nice place. One of them is next door, another down the street, and there’s a bunch of condominiums, and...” Sapnap trails off, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. George picks up on what he’s saying faster than the others, and even though it’s exactly what he wants, too, he’s still going to tease Sapnap about it.

“Sapnap,” he says. “Are you saying you want to move in so we’re close to you?”

“Shut the hell up!” Sapnap barks, and the whole crew laughs. “Yes, okay? I am saying that! Don’t tell me you don’t want it too!”

“It’s something to think about, at least,” Niki says, and she’s looking at Puffy, and Puffy is looking right back at her. George feels like he’s disturbing something. “We’re going to head off to bed, I think, if there’s nothing else, Commander?”

“Nothing else,” Techno agrees. “You’re dismissed for the night. See you all tomorrow morning.”

Tomorrow morning. Their last full day in space.

After Puffy and Niki go off to bed, Sapnap follows. Techno leaves Dream and George shortly after, and as George attempts to get up and stretch, Dream pulls him back down.

“Hi,” George says, slightly surprised. “How’s it going?”

“What do you think of all that?” Dream asks.

“What do you mean?”

“Getting a house. Living next door to Sapnap. Down the street from Puffy and Niki.”

George freezes. Then he grins, and Dream grins back.

“Dream,” he says. “Are you asking me to move in with you?”

Dream flushes bright red, and George cackles.

“Only if you really want to!” Dream says quickly. “Only if- only if that’s something you would be interested in. Because I am. Interested in it. I’m going to stop talking now.”

“I’m going to be honest with you,” George says, and Dream’s face falls. George hurries to backtrack. “I would love to. I don’t think I’d be able to sleep a night without you anymore.”

Dream beams at him, and George beams right back.

“You want to buy a house with me?”

And God, does George want that. He wants domestic moments with Dream, cooking together, laughing together, watching football together (American or otherwise), just... being together. Living together. Coexisting together.

“Yes,” George says. “I want to buy a house with you.”

And Dream laughs and stands up, pulling George up with him, and spins them both around, and God, George thinks, things are only going to get better from here.

“Alright,” Bad says quietly to his team. Punz, Ponk, Sam, and Purpled- his primary workers for the most important functions of Mission Control- all stare back at him. “This is possibly the most important landing of all of our careers. So we can’t fuck this up, yeah?”

“Don’t worry, Bad,” Punz says, rolling his eyes. “We’ve done hundreds of landings.”

“We’ll get the job done, Bad,” Sam agrees. “You can count on us.”

“I better,” he says sternly. “Go home. Get plenty of sleep. In thirty-six hours, we’re bringing the Ares III crew home.”

The team nods and he waves them off, leaving him alone in his office. A moment later, there’s a soft knock on the door.

Bad glances up from his computer and waves Tubbo Underscore in. The kid’s holding a laptop and he looks nervous.

“What’s up?” Bad asks.

“I got an email,” Tubbo says. “From the MIC.”

“Oh, God,” Bad mutters. “Yeah, yeah. Tell me about it.”

Tubbo takes this as an invitation to sit down across from Bad, not that he minds. He’s found that he actually likes the kid’s company- he’s smart, passionate, and doesn’t take shit from anyone. Tommy and Ranboo are the same way- if they’re the ones that NASA’s future are in the hands of, well, maybe that isn’t so bad.

“They’re targeting you, I think, sir,” Tubbo says awkwardly. “Because they emailed me asking what I know about the possibility of fights between the secret council.”

“The secret council?” Bad asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes, sir- that’s what everyone calls you, Wilbur, Fundy, Quackity, and Phil.”

“Jeez,” Bad laughs. “How come I haven’t heard of that before?”

“It’s cause of the Elrond thing, I think- Wilbur told Tommy and Tommy can’t keep his mouth shut.” Tubbo shrugs, like it doesn’t really matter, like Bad isn’t focusing on the important bit. Right. The important bit. The MIC targeting him as well as Technoblade.

“Let them target me,” Bad shrugs. “I went against Phil’s direct orders-” and God, does it feel good to say that out loud to someone that isn’t Skeppy- “-and we handled it. The situation has been dismissed. It’s nothing the MIC needs to worry about, and it’s got nothing to do with George being left on Mars.”

“I don’t think it’s just about George anymore,” Tubbo shrugs. “They’re trying to reform NASA, I think. There’ve been rumors they’re going to call for Wilbur’s resignation. *Phil’s* resignation.”

“And they’re not going to get either,” Bad shrugs. “It’s politics, Tubbo. I wouldn’t worry about it.”

“What do I say to the email, then?”

“Just tell them you don’t know anything,” Bad replies. He smiles conspiratorially. “That’s what I’ve been doing.”

Tubbo chuckles and wishes Bad a good night, and Bad waves as he leaves the office before sitting back in his chair.

This whole thing is almost over with. The Ares III crew is almost home. Preparations for fixing the *Hermes* are almost complete, to be enacted a few weeks after Commander Technoblade’s crew arrives home. His ship- his baby, the one he’s been working on since the beginning- her journey is not coming to an end.

George's journey is, though. He's been emailing Bad about how he doesn't think he'll miss space, but Bad knows the truth. Every astronaut that comes back misses space. It's just the way it goes.

He thinks space misses the astronauts right back. Maybe that's why it tried to keep George on Mars- after so long of humanity taking from space, maybe it wanted to take right back.

Too bad, Bad thinks, that humanity will not let go of one of its own so easily. Space has her stars. Humanity? They've got George.

It's almost time, Wilbur thinks. It's almost time to bring them home.

In thirty-six short hours, he's going to be able to hug his brother. In thirty-six short hours, the Ares III crew will set foot on Earth.

It's almost time.

"What'd Bad have to say?" Tommy asks as Tubbo slips into the backseat. He's a little frustrated that Ranboo managed to steal shotgun again, but he's not going to say anything about it- besides, he's not really mad.

"Just tell them we don't know anything," Tubbo answers. "So. I don't know how well that's going to work out."

"Oh, they'll probably call us to testify, or something," Ranboo chuckles.

"Right," Tubbo snorts. "Can we get going, Tommy? I've gotta feed Michael."

Michael. Tubbo's adorable cat, the light of his life- and Ranboo's cat, too, he supposes.

“Course,” Tommy says, starting the car. He keeps glances toward the clock, and Tubbo can’t blame him. They’ve all got siblings that are going to be home in thirty-six hours, siblings they haven’t seen in more than two and a half years. Tubbo misses Puffy to hell and back, just like he knows Ranboo misses Niki and Tommy misses Techno.

Soon, he thinks. They’ll be back soon.

This is his first time going home all week, after Eret asked him to run the course calculations for *Hermes’* orbit around Earth. That’s what being a semi-famous astrodynamacist gets you, Tubbo thinks. At least the promotion comes with more money.

Ranboo’s officially graduated from the astronaut training program, as evident by the fact that their apartment is still filthy from the party they held a month ago. He’s been working in the meteorology department, but there’s talks of sending him on Ares 6, which is insane to Tubbo- he could be running course calculations for his best friend. Tommy could spy on their best friends with his satellites.

Tommy himself’s gotten a promotion, too- he’s not in charge of SatCon, but he’s pretty damn close to it. Eret’s been saying that when they retire, they’re going to recommend Tubbo to take over. All in all, Tubbo thinks, the three of them are doing pretty well for themselves.

He scrolls through his phone as Tommy drives them home- oh. He’s got an email from Puffy. He opens it quickly and then laughs, showing his phone to Ranboo.

His sister’s buying a house with Niki.

“I give it three months before they get a cat,” Ranboo snorts. Tubbo doesn’t take him up on the bet. Ranboo’s got more money than he does, anyways.

George wakes up on his last full day in space with warm arms wrapped around him. He snuggles back into them, not bothering to drag himself out of bed despite the fact that they forgot to set an alarm and they’ve got stuff to do. In response, Dream’s arms tighten, and George thinks yes, this is good, this is where he is meant to be.

He can't stay for long. He pulls himself out of Dream's arms and laughs at Dream's weak protests. They both get themselves ready and then make their way to the kitchen, where the rest of the crew is waiting for them.

The rest of the day is spent doing any final clean-up tasks. George helps Niki with her lab mice, who went up with them and are now coming down with them. He does his own tasks, then helps everyone else with theirs, and by the time their leisure hours have arrived, they're prepared to descend back to Earth.

They're quiet that night, all of them sitting together. Puffy and Niki mention that they're moving in together. Dream mentions that he and George are doing the same thing. Sapnap looks pleased. Techno doesn't say anything, but he's got a small smile playing at the corners of his lips, like he knows something they don't. George decides not to pry.

He relishes that night, wrapped in Dream's arms, letting Dream hold him close. It's the last night for a while that they have this for certain, and God does George love this certainty, the certainty of having Dream's arms entangled with his, having Dream's warm body pressed against his own. They've got the certainty of the planets and the stars and the Moon, and the certainty of each other. That's all they need.

The next morning, they wake up. They're close to Earth, now, and they're ready. God, they're ready. They're going home. They're going *home*.

It's eleven AM Houston time that they strap themselves into the pod that will take them home. All Sapnap has to do is press a button- Houston will take it from there, they'll land, and then they'll immediately be shuttered off to be examined. But that doesn't matter. What matters is the six of them, floating in the bridge, in one massive group hug.

"Remember," Techno says. "We are a crew. We have gotten through this. And whatever comes next, well- we'll get through that too."

Here we go, George thinks, and they don their suits and get themselves into the pod and Bad's voice comes in over the comms.

"*Hermes*, this is Mission Control, please verify that you are receiving."

"Mission Control, this is *Hermes* Actual, we are receiving," Technoblade says, and George can

imagine the chaos back on Earth.

“Good to hear you, *Hermes*,” Bad says. “Ready for descent?”

Techno glances around- everyone gives him a thumbs-up.

“Ready for descent,” Techno confirms. “On your mark, Mission Control.”

“Got it,” Bad agrees.

This is it.

They’re going home.

“This is the flight director,” Bad says, glancing back. Everyone gathered in the VIP waiting room- the families of the crew, Wilbur, Phil, Fundy, Quackity- they’re all watching him. He flashes a thumbs-up. “Begin launch status check.”

“Roger that,” comes Punz’s response. “Give me a go/no-go for descent. Talker?”

“Go.”

“Timer?”

“Go.”

Bad rests his chin carefully on his hands. They’ve got cameras displaying the crew, all of them buckled in and ready to go- Sapnap is making faces at it. Bad rolls his eyes.

“Prop One.”

“Go.”

Phil sits front-row center in the VIP viewing room, his status affording him all the best. Wilbur is next to him, Quackity on his other side. Fundy is pacing back and forth in the back of the room. If everything goes as planned, Fundy and Phil will rush to the press conference room to give the speech in the blue folder in Phil’s hands. Wilbur and Bad will be rushing to meet the crew, along with a fair amount of doctors. They’ve assigned Quackity the job of getting the families to NASA’s on-grounds hospital to meet their relatives.

“Prop Two.”

“Go.”

“ACC.”

“Go.”

Around the world, everyone is watching. This is the moment that makes or breaks them. This is the moment that they get their crew home.

“CAPCOM.”

“Go,” Ponk says.

“Telemetry,” Punz says, glancing at Sam.

“Go,” Sam replies.

“Guidance.”

“Go,” Purpled says. Bad takes a deep breath in, then out.

“Launch Vehicle Director.”

“Go,” Sapnap’s voice says over the comms. The VIP room cheers. Bad does not move.

“Flight, this is Launch Control, we are go for launch,” Punz says, glancing over to Bad.

“Roger,” Bad says, checking the countdown. “This is Flight, we are go for launch on schedule.”

“Roger that, Flight,” Punz says with a grin. “Descent will begin on schedule.”

Bad watches as the countdown at the bottom corner of the screen reaches 00:15- what the people are waiting for. The timer controller begins the verbal countdown.

He takes a few deep breaths in and out, then glances back at Wilbur. Wilbur nods solemnly. On the screen, Sapnap’s finger hovers over a button.

“Ten. Nine. Eight.”

Another breath in.

“Seven. Six. Five.”

“Ignition sequence start,” Punz says, and Sapnap hits the button.

“Four. Three. Two. One. *Hermes* crew beginning descent.”

Another breath out.

“Trim?”

“Trim’s good.”

“Course?”

“On course.”

Silence for a few moments, then a few more checks.

“Altitude ten thousand kilometers.”

“Velocity on track.”

More checks. More silence.

“Altitude five thousand kilometers.”

“Velocity still on track. Beginning slow-down.”

“They’re well through the atmosphere, Flight.”

Bad lets out a sigh of relief. Hardly anything could go wrong now. He knows on the wood under the desk anyways.

“Altitude one thousand kilometers.”

“Course?” Bad asks.

“Almost exact. Timed it perfectly.”

“Guidance?”

“All good here.”

“CAPCOM?”

“Ares III, what’s your status?” Ponk asks.

“All good,” comes Technoblade’s response.

“All good,” Ponk echoes, and Bad snorts.

“Altitude five hundred kilometers. Four hundred. Three hundred.”

“Velocity on track.”

“Course on track.”

Silence. Silence. Silence.

“Altitude ten thousand meters.”

“Velocity is good.”

“Course is good.”

“Altitude five thousand meters.”

“Guidance?”

“Good,” Purpled replies, extremely focused on his controls. “And.... good.”

“Altitude twenty-five hundred meters... twenty... fifteen... altitude one thousand meters.”

“Velocity is good. Bringing her to a stop.”

“Course is good.”

“CAPCOM?”

“Ares III?”

“All good,” Techno says again.

“Altitude nine hundred meters. Eight hundred. Seven hundred. Six. Five. Four.”

“She’s on course.”

“Velocity is good.”

“Three hundred meters.”

“Careful now,” Punz says teasingly. Purpled flips him off. Bad scoffs.

“Two hundred meters.”

“Velocity is good, Flight.”

“Course is perfect.”

“One hundred meters.”

“Bringing her in now.”

“Ten meters. And... we have touchdown.”

“The Ares III crew is successfully on the ground!” Bad announces, and the room bursts into cheers. Punz gives him a thumbs-up, and Bad meets Wilbur’s gaze as they rush out of the room. They meet each other in the hallway and practically sprint to the pad.

The crew is finally home.

Chapter End Notes

some news:

we are officially 2/3 of the way through this story!!! :D thank you all so so much for your support- i read every single comment and adore every single one of them. thank you, thank you, thank you. <3 you guys mean the world to me

also!! some lovely people made fanart for this fic which you should totally check out!

see [julius's](#) art [here](#)

see [mae's](#) art [here](#)

that's all for now! <3

[my twitter](#)

[this fic's spotify playlist](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated!

Demeter

Chapter Notes

i have been so bad at responding to comments but please please know that i read and appreciate every single one so so much. you guys are partially the reason i write, just knowing that there are people out there enjoying my stuff makes a huge difference. so, thank you all, and i hope you enjoy this (not proof-read) chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“We at NASA are pleased to announce that at 11:37 AM Central Standard Time, the Ares III crew successfully landed in Houston. All six crew are currently en route to NASA’s on-site hospital for physical and mental wellness checks, where they will be held for at least a week as a result of their prolonged exposure to space and its dangers. They will not be taking comments from or delivering statements to the press at this time. We are incredibly proud of our six astronauts and all that they have achieved in the past months. If there are any further questions, our Director of Media Relations will be pleased to answer them.”

“And that was a statement from Director Phil Watson of NASA, delivered only moments ago. We are hoping to get a look at the Ares III crew as they disembark from the *Hermes* shuttle, the world’s first image of Doctor George Davidson since his abandonment on Mars. We’re waiting with bated breath.

“Waiting on the platform are Director of Mars Missions Doctor Wilbur Soot and *Hermes* flight director Halo Bad, along with a team of doctors waiting to assist the crew. Oh- the crowd has gone silent, and- yes! First off the shuttle is Captain Cara Puffy, followed closely by Doctor Niki Nihachu! It looks like- oh, it looks like the crew is surrounding Doctor Davidson, possibly to keep him away from the media. Following is Major Nick Sapnap and Doctor Clay Bloque, and the last to disembark is Commander Technoblade.

“It looks like they’re all being led inside, so we’re not going to get any further video at this time. Thank you for tuning in to CNN’s live coverage of this historically monumental event. We’ll now take you to direct coverage of the press conference led by Media Relations Director Fundy.”

It takes them all a moment to get their bearings once they land. It’s a feeling George doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to get used to, passing through the atmosphere and hitting the ground. It’s nothing horrible, just... odd. Too much pressure all at once.

They know how to disembark the ship, having gone over the procedure time and time again. Figuring the news vultures would be out, Techno has ordered them to surround George, to keep him away from prying eyes. George doesn't even mind.

They've got to get themselves off the ship, and from there, there will be doctors waiting with wheelchairs to bring them inside. Niki and Puffy go first, then Sapnap and Dream place themselves on either side of George, and Technoblade brings up the rear.

Getting that first glimpse of sunlight is like heaven before George's very eyes. He can't see too much, and the dizziness is already starting to get to him, and he thinks Sapnap and Dream are keeping him upright as much as he's helping them. There's a roaring in his ears that might be the crowd and might just be his blood. He feels heavy and he knows it's the blood flowing down to his legs, a mixture of the gravitational atmosphere and just normal returning from space procedures, and before he can think too much of it, they're inside and he's being shoved down into a wheelchair.

"You've got two minutes!" someone yells, and then Bad is practically on top of him, hugging him awkwardly from George's seated position, but hugging him nonetheless. George laughs even as the nausea churns in his stomach, and finally Bad pulls back.

"George, you muffin, you did it!" he cries, and then he turns to the rest of the crew, all in wheelchairs of their own. "You all did it!"

Wilbur has one arm around Technoblade, and as Bad moves to hug Dream, he makes his way over to George. George forces himself up out of the wheelchair so he can collapse into Wilbur's arms.

"You got me home," George says, as forcefully as he can muster. Wilbur laughs and ruffles his hair, then pushes him gently back down into the wheelchair.

"A lot of people helped get you home, George," he says, but he's grinning from ear to ear.

"Yeah, well," George says, grinning sheepishly back, and then another door opens and a whole slew of people are running through.

The families.

George sees a couple of kids he barely recognizes rushing toward Niki and Puffy, Tommy practically throwing himself at Technoblade, a young girl hurtling into Dream's arms. Sapnap shoves himself out of his wheelchair to embrace Karl, and George-

George sees his parents, both of them coming straight for him. His mother doesn't even let him get out of the wheelchair before she's on her knees hugging him, his father wrapping his arms around both of them, and George hugs them both back as tightly as possible. It all slams into him at once, the fact that he's really back, he's really here, they fucking did it, *he fucking did it*.

"It's good to see you, Georgie," his mother says, pulling back, and there are tears in her eyes and there are tears in George's too, and he pulls her back in for another hug. He makes eye contact with Dream over her shoulder, and Dream smiles at him.

He doesn't know it yet, but that's going to be the last of Dream he sees for a while. The doctors swarm them again, pulling them all in separate directions, to separate rooms. Someone is talking to him and he thinks Niki might be yelling at someone and then everything gets a bit too overwhelming for just a moment too long and the next thing he knows he's falling asleep in a hospital bed with his mother by his side.

Drista lunges into Dream's arms and he laughs, trying to spin her around in the wheelchair, and his mother comes up on them moments later. They're both laughing and his mother is saying something but Dream isn't paying, he's just reveling in this moment.

He makes eye contact with George and they beam at each other, and then there are bodies passing between them and he's lost sight of George and there are doctors telling him it's time to go.

"But he just got here!" Drista protests. Someone tells her they had their two minutes and they need to go run tests on all the astronauts, and then suddenly several people are shouting and then through the commotion one loud voice rings out- Niki's.

"He can't be alone!" she's shouting. "As the doctor that's been around him for months, I'm telling you that for the sake of his mental health you cannot leave him alone!"

And all Dream knows in that moment, through the dizziness and the nausea and the blood pumping

through his brain so loudly he can practically hear it, is that he has to get to George. He tries to get up and several pairs of hands pull him back down, and then he's trying to barrel through them down the hallway after the love of his life, and he thinks he's about to yell at someone when Techno's voice booms through the hall they're situated in.

"Dream!" he yells, and he's got his Commander voice on, and Dream instantly stops. "We'll see him soon. Remember what I said."

The doctors are muttering about how easily Techno's able to get all four of them to calm down- Dream hadn't even noticed that Sapnap, Puffy, and Niki had all been attempting to reach George, too. Karl has a tight grip on Sapnap's shoulder, there's a kid that's practically thrown himself in Puffy's lap to get her to sit back in her wheelchair, and Niki looks rightfully furious. But Techno's told them to stand down, so they're standing down.

"We're going to take you to your own room, Doctor," one of the people surrounding him says to Dream. He nods, still staring down the hallway after George. "Doctor Davidson will be well taken care of, don't worry."

"We're letting his parents stay with him, he won't be alone," someone says, not unkindly, and it's only that statement that truly gets the crew to calm themselves.

Being separated from the crew is hellish, Dream decides after only ten minutes of tests being run. They make his mother and Drista wait with the other family members, meaning he's alone with a bunch of strangers, something he absolutely detests when he's spent the past two and a half years with his crew, his family.

After nearly three hours, they've declared him completely healthy and sent him off to a room to sleep in. He wants to stay awake, wants to find George. Instead, his mother and Drista are allowed back into the room and he finds himself drifting off, his sister's voice lulling him to sleep after a long, eventful day.

George has decided that he hates medical exams. He's been poked and prodded all day, and he's completely sick of the IV they've got hooked up to his arm. They kicked his parents out when he woke up, and now he's been left alone while they analyze the results of his tests.

He goes through the list of things he wants to talk about. He's bored. There's a heavy pressure on

his whole body while he readjusts to Earth's gravity. He's bored. He actually really, really hates the IV. He's bored. He's so goddamn bored. He wants to talk to Dream, or anyone, really. Most importantly, he wants to find out if he needs a lung transplant or not, which is apparently still a major concern.

Luckily, he doesn't need to wait for long. A team of doctors begin bustling about in the room, handing each other things and murmuring softly, none of them paying attention to him. Finally, they all clear out except for one, a kind-looking and somewhat familiar man who takes a seat next to his bed.

"Hi, Doctor Davidson, I'm Skeppy," the doctor says, and George connects a name to a face- Bad's husband. George smiles at him. "It's an honor to be taking care of you today."

"Please, call me George," he says, and he already hates the latter part of that statement, he doesn't like the idea of anyone being honored to be around him. "What's the news, Doc? Do I need a lung transplant?"

"Well, as Niki informed you early on after your rescue, you were at a heavy risk for pulmonary fibrosis as a result of scarred lung tissue," Skeppy tells him. He starts flipping through a chart, and he takes a deep breath. "Considering how scarred your lung tissue is, you're still at risk for that, as well as pulmonary hypertension and heart failure."

"Jesus," George mutters, which- alright, he knew all that already. "Anything I'm not at risk for?"

"We've ruled out radiation poisoning, if it makes you feel any better."

"It- it does, a little bit, actually. So what's the news on the transplant, then?"

"I'm not going to lie to you, George. Considering everything, a lung transplant is easily the safest option. You're a high-priority case, and we could have the surgery performed by the end of the week. However, there are other options if you don't want to do a transplant. None of them are quite as effective, but they're there." Skeppy flips back to the front of his chart and smiles. "Either way, NASA is making sure you're looked after with the utmost care."

"Jesus," George mutters again. "Alright. I did my best to avoid pneumonia at least, right?"

“You did,” Skeppy tells him. “Which is why we have options other than a transplant. Medication, oxygen therapy, the works. It’d be a rigorous healing process, but we expect that with or without the transplant, assuming no other complications arise, you’ll be able to make a full recovery. We’ll give you some time if you’d like to consider your options.”

“Cool,” George says, for lack of better words. “Um.”

“Dr. Nihachu has asked me to remind you of the risks of both options while considering,” Skeppy adds. “With a lung transplant, there is a higher chance of survival, but there’s also the risk of rejection, infection, the works.”

“The works,” George echoes blankly. “Right.” He takes another moment to process everything Skeppy is telling him, and then he perks up. “You said you talked to Niki?”

“Yes, she assembled the team of doctors for you herself a few weeks ago. Had she not mentioned it?”

“No,” he responds, although it makes sense. It makes him smile- his crew is looking out for him when they can’t be there themselves.

“Well, we talked this morning.” Skeppy is smiling, clearly waiting for him to ask more questions.

“Are they okay?” George practically demands. “My crew?”

“Everyone’s perfectly fine. No health complications at all, other than the usual risks that come with returning from space. All of them are asking about you on a consistent basis. They’d like to see you quite badly.”

There it is. They want to see him, but they can’t. George is going to be alone for the foreseeable future. He’s going to have to sleep alone and deal with the nightmares, he’s-

“And they can’t see me, can they?” he asks, and Skeppy frowns and shakes his head. “Alright. Alright. Um- can you tell them all that I’m fine?”

“I’ll be sure to let them know,” Skeppy agrees. “We have your psychologist coming in later, just so you’re aware- she’s going to do a full mental assessment. I think you’re familiar with Alyssa?”

“Yes,” George says, perking up. “Yeah, we’ve been emailing for a while.”

“She’s quite eager to finally meet you. She’ll be here in an hour or two. Are you alright on your own until then, or would you like someone to-”

“Stay,” George finishes before Skeppy can. “Are my parents still here?”

“They’re not in the building currently, but I can send someone else in to keep you company,” Skeppy tells him. “They’ll be here in a few minutes.”

Which is how, five minutes later, George finds himself still lying in bed with the stupid IV in his arm when none other than Tommy Innit bursts into the room.

“George!” he cries victoriously. “God, I knew you’d do it!”

“Hey, Tommy,” George says, pleasantly surprised. “How’re you doing?”

“I am so good, big man,” Tommy says. “I am just reeling in the women with all my cool science knowledge. Women adore me. Fish fear me. I am such a big man thanks to you.”

He’s got a shit-eating grin on his face. George rolls his eyes.

“I changed my mind,” he says flatly, even though he’s smiling, too. “I actually want to be alone. Please get out.”

“Nah, George, we’re best friends,” Tommy informs him, taking a seat in the chair next to his bed. “I’m a cure for your boredom, aren’t I? Let me entertain you. Like a court jester. You’re the famous one, you get to be the king.”

“God, I hate that.” George can’t help himself from spitting it out, and he rushes to apologize.

Tommy, however, doesn't look taken aback in the slightest.

"I would, too, I think," he says. "They said you're gonna be here being monitored for at least a week, though, so you don't have to deal with anything until then."

"Yeah," George snorts. "But what are the chances they'll let me see the crew before then?"

"I dunno," Tommy shrugs, a mischievous grin on his face. "I heard that they were working up quite a storm trying to see you the second they found out you were awake. You should be able to see them within a few days."

"A few days," George huffs. And, in a rare moment of vulnerability with someone other than his crew, he says, "I've been with them for months, Tommy. I don't know if I can make it a few days."

"You can," Tommy tells him earnestly. "You will."

He will.

He and Tommy talk for nearly an hour, Tommy catching him up on everything that's been going on on Earth, all the celebrity gossip he's missed, and when it starts getting overwhelming they change the subject.

"It's just good to be back," George says at one point. "Like Demeter's been waiting for me."

"Demeter isn't even the goddess of the earth, dumbass, she's agriculture and the harvest," Tommy says stubbornly. When George looks at him in surprise, he says, "What? I'm practically brothers with Technoblade. You think I don't know a thing or two about Greek mythology?"

When the knock on the door comes later, they both jump, and a woman with a mask covering the lower half of her face pokes her head into the room.

"Hello," she says cheerfully. "I'm Alyssa, I'm here for George?"

“Right, sorry,” Tommy says. “See you later, big man.”

“See you, Tommy,” George says, waving with the non-IV arm, and Tommy closes the door behind him as he leaves. Alyssa takes his seat in the chair and even though George can’t see her mouth, he can tell that she’s smiling warmly.

“George,” she says. “It’s so nice to finally meet you.”

“It’s nice to finally meet you, too,” he says, and he’s almost surprised to find that he’s getting a bit choked up. Alyssa just continues to smile at him while he regains his composure. More than a year ago, when they first told him they were assigning him a psychologist, while he was still trapped on Mars, he never could have imagined that it would lead to this moment. Back on Earth, the same psychologist sitting in front of him, waiting for him to speak. “So, you’re doing a mental assessment, then?”

“I don’t really need to,” she tells him. “I feel like I already know a fair amount. Of course, I can’t stop you from refusing therapy, but I can say I highly recommend it.”

“Yeah,” George agrees, almost too eagerly. “I don’t think I’m going to be stopping therapy any time soon.”

Because he can’t spend a night without Dream. Because he still wakes up from nightmares much too often. Because he was still triple-checking everything on the ship before going to bed, because even now he might be getting a fucking *lung transplant* and there’s just so much to unpack with the fact that he still doesn’t think he’s fully recovered from a year and a half completely alone.

“Good,” Alyssa says. “That’s good to hear. How are you doing, then?”

And God, he can’t stop himself from spilling everything to her.

“I just want to be with the crew,” he says immediately, trying to convey just how deep this desire is by pouring it into his voice. He thinks she gets the picture. “I want to- God. I couldn’t sleep a single night on that ship without someone being there with me, and I have no idea how I made it through last night, and I have no idea how I’m going to make it through tonight.”

She nods. She wants him to keep going. He obliges.

“I’m terrified about all of this shit with the MIC. I’m terrified that something’s going to happen to split our crew up. I’m just- I’m terrified, all the time, and I know I shouldn’t be because I’m *safe*, I’m not *alone* anymore-”

“Don’t,” she interrupts him. “Don’t say you *shouldn’t*, George. You aren’t *supposed* to feel anything. If you feel terrified, then you feel terrified. If you feel anxious, then you feel anxious. If you think that you should feel a certain way, you’re going to rot away in your guilt.”

“Wow,” he laughs, humorlessly. “You just cut right to the chase, don’t you?”

“I try not to pull my punches,” Alyssa agrees. “I find it works best with certain patients to be blunt. You’ve been surviving on your own for so long that you just need to hear things how they are. And this is how they are, George: no matter what happens with the MIC, or with your crew, or with any of it- you have people on your side. Your crew is on your side. I’m on your side. Hell, the whole *world* is on your side. You represent a greater goal for humanity, like it or not, George. And no matter what happens, things are going to be okay.”

She looks him dead in the eyes, and she doesn’t pull away her gaze. His eyes dart down to the bedsheets, where he’s been fiddling with them, trying to push down the wave of emotions threatening to spill over.

“Thank you,” he says, and his voice comes out as a croak. “I needed that, I think.”

“Of course,” she says, and she’s smiling again, her eyes crinkled up and looking at him kindly. “As for sleeping arrangements- I’ll talk to some people. See what I can do. If you do have your nightmares, though- and you didn’t hear this from me- do your best to play it up. They’ll be more lenient that way.”

George laughs, and Alyssa laughs along with him. “Should you be encouraging that?” he asks, and she shrugs.

“Probably not,” she says. “But hey. You represent something bigger than all of us, George. You should be allowed to get your way when you want to.”

They talk for a while longer. They discuss the pros and cons of the lung transplant, and by the time they move on to a new topic, George isn’t feeling any better about coming to a decision. He

doesn't even realize what time it is until Skeppy is coming back into the room, clipboard in hand, and telling Alyssa that visiting hours are over.

"Alright," Alyssa says, grabbing her bag as she gets up from the chair. "I'll see you later, George, okay? Remember what we talked about." She winks at him as she leaves the room, and George stifles a chuckle.

"We just have some final tests we want to run before we let you go to bed," Skeppy says. "And we've got dinner, too- I know Doctor Nihachu has been keeping you on a diet recommended by our nutritionists, so we're going to keep you on that track to get you back to full health. Now that you're on Earth, it should be easier to do."

"Good to hear," George says. They get him in a wheelchair and go back to what they were doing that morning, wheeling him around and hooking him up to various machines to test different bodily functions. They don't let him walk, which is vaguely disappointing, and at one point when he sees Puffy being wheeled away down the hall, they don't let him go back and talk to her, even when he nearly throws himself out of his wheelchair in an attempt to see where she was going.

It's disappointing, to say the least. It's only been a day and all he wants is to be with his crew.

They let his parents back in that night, which he's eternally grateful for. He doesn't know if he could make it a night alone. When he wakes up from the nightmares- this one about the water reclaimer breaking and him dying of thirst- his parents are no longer there. But he knows he's not back on Mars because of the damn IV in his wrist and all the other machines they've got him hooked up to, so there's that, at least.

A nurse pokes her head in shortly after he awakens, bathing the room in light from the hallway. He peers back at her, and she smiles gently.

"Your heart rate monitor spiked," she informs him. "Are you feeling alright?"

"Yeah," he confirms, mouth dry. "Just a nightmare."

"Yes, Alyssa told us about those," the nurse nods. She glances around. "I'm not technically supposed to do this, but would you like me to bring Doctor Bloque in here? He hasn't been able to sleep yet."

George practically melts. “Yes, please,” he says, and the nurse nods and slips back out of the room. A few minutes later, there’s the sound of a wheelchair coming from down the hallway. The door opens wider and the nurse flicks on the light, and there he is, illuminated by the fluorescent lighting.

“George,” Dream breathes out, trying to get up out of the wheelchair. The nurse laughs and wheels him closer, and the second he’s able to, Dream grabs George’s hand. George nearly cries as he tugs Dream’s hand up to press it to his lips. “Hey. They wouldn’t let us see you.”

“I know,” George whispers. He glances up at the nurse thankfully, and she nods before heading for the door.

“I’ll give you two some privacy,” she says as she disappears. Dream just keeps staring at him, and George can feel the heat rising to his face.

“So?” Dream asks. “What’s the news?”

“I’ve got two options,” George snorts. “Lung transplant or no lung transplant.”

“Jesus,” Dream mutters, reaching up to run a hand through George’s hair. George tries not to melt into the touch and fails completely. “Do you know what you’re going to do?”

“Not yet,” George shrugs. He feels small, beneath Dream’s gaze, and his best friend seems to come to a decision. He lets go of George’s hand and George longs for the warmth for only a moment, and then Dream is standing up.

“Budge over,” he says, and George laughs as he attempts to scoot himself to one side. Dream slides under the blankets next to him and wraps both arms around him, and this time George doesn’t even try not to melt into the touch. “There. That’s better.”

“God, I’ve missed you,” George can’t stop himself from murmuring, and Dream wheezes.

“It’s been a day, Georgie,” he says, his voice impossibly fond. “I’ve missed you, too.”

They rest there for a while, and eventually, the nurse comes back in. She smiles sadly as she tells them she's got to take Dream back to his room.

"Please could he stay?" George asks, trying to put on his best puppy-dog eyes. The nurse sighs.

"Alright," she says. "Just for tonight. And don't tell anyone it was me who let you."

"Thank you," they both say at the same time, and all three of them chuckle as the nurse slips out of the room again, turning the lights off as she goes.

"Pretty privilege," Dream mutters into George's hair, and he laughs again. George doesn't know at what point he falls asleep, but this time when he wakes up, there's sunlight streaming through the curtains and a warm body still pressed against his own.

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

[spotify playlist](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated!

Apollo

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Needless to say, the doctors are not pleased when they find Dream in George's bed the next morning. Skeppy, at least, is merely exasperated, sighing as he points for Dream to leave the room.

"Sorry, Doc," Dream says, wheezing. George tries to hold back his own peels of laughter. "It was just so tempting."

"Dream," Skeppy says sternly, but he's also clearly trying not to laugh. Dream slides out of bed and back into his wheelchair, still gripping George's hand. George doesn't want to let go. He never wants to let go. "We need to talk to George in private, please."

"I'll be back," Dream says warningly as he wheels himself out of the room. "You can't keep our crew separated for long, Doc!"

"I believe you," Skeppy says, finally allowing himself to chuckle as he turns back to George. "Have you come to a decision yet?"

"Oh, God," George mutters. "I need to do that now?" One of the most momentous decisions of his life, and that's saying something, because he's been to space.

"We'd like to get the transplant done as soon as possible if that's what you decide," Skeppy tells him. "Otherwise we need to start you on oxygen therapy as soon as possible."

"Well," George says, frowning. He doesn't necessarily want a lung transplant- he feels like he knows exactly what the rest of the crew would say about it, and they'd all think it was unnecessary. Too risky. There are easier ways to cure him, especially considering physically, he doesn't really need to be cured of anything. "You said I didn't actually have pulmonary fibrosis, right?"

"Right," Skeppy agrees. "It's just a risk. You and Doctor Nihachu were steadfast with your care on the *Hermes*, so there weren't nearly as many complications as there could have been."

"So it would make sense if I didn't have a lung transplant."

“Yes,” Skeppy agrees. “I suppose it would.”

“There,” George shrugs. “Someone else probably needs a new set of lungs more than I do. Let’s go with the oxygen therapy, Doc.”

“Sure thing,” Skeppy shrugs. “We’ll get you started on that as soon as possible. We do need to run some final tests on Dream, but after that, would you like him back in here?”

“About that,” George says with a frown. “Can I place a formal request? Since you’re my doctor, and everything?”

Skeppy sighs, like he knows what’s coming.

“Just, for my mental state,” George says with a grin. “I think it would be best to let Dream in here whenever I want, you know, since I’m so important and everything.”

“I suppose that would be in order,” Skeppy says with a huff, trying to hold back a smile. George pumps his fist in the air. “We’ll come up with a list of stuff we do need to talk to you about, I should be back in a couple of minutes. It includes no rigorous activity for as long as you’re on the oxygen therapy- and that includes no going back to space.”

“I’ll be real honest with you, Doc,” George says. “I think I’ve had enough space to last a lifetime.”

Skeppy nods, like he understands, even though George knows he never could. “Director Watson will want to speak to your whole crew at the end of the week when we’re done monitoring you, and then you’ll be briefed for a press conference and then... I’m not sure what happens then. But you’re under my care until our team of doctors here declares you fit to no longer be.”

“Sounds good,” George shrugs. He doesn’t care about press conferences, or future jobs, or the inevitable investigation. He cares about Dream, and Sapnap and Techno and Niki and Puffy, and everyone on the ground (though he supposes they’re all on the ground now). “And when can I actually see the rest of the crew?”

“Hopefully tomorrow,” Skeppy says, and George sighs. That’s better than nothing, he guesses.

“They wanna give him a *what* ?” Technoblade says. Wilbur sighs. He knew Techno would react like this, which is why he didn’t want to tell him. “Why in their right minds- do they know how dangerous that is?”

“Yes, Techno,” Wilbur says patiently. “I do believe the trained doctors know how dangerous a lung transplant is.”

“A lung transplant,” Techno practically spits out. He tries to sit up, and Wilbur reaches out to shove him back down. “A *lung transplant* . And he agreed to it?”

“It’s his highest chance of survival without complications,” Wilbur explains, not like Techno doesn’t already know. Techno, for his part, is still struggling to get up. “He’s been through a lot worse, Tech.”

“Did he agree to it or not?” Techno demands. Wilbur sighs again.

“He’s still thinking on it,” he says. “They’ve given him another option, but it’s more likely he’ll have complications in the future. The second that he starts showing signs of hypertension or fibrosis, they’re switching out his lungs.”

Techno finally relaxes. They all know how to weigh risks, of course they do, but George knows it better than any of them. He’ll come to the right decision.

“When can we see him?” Techno asks. “Hell, when can I see any of my crew?”

“Soon,” Wilbur promises. He checks the time on his phone and stands up. “I’ve gotta get going-”

“Wilbur,” Techno says, catching his wrist. “Thank you.”

Wilbur smiles. “I’ll be back tomorrow,” he promises, and then slips out of the room.

The second he's gone, Techno begins inching his way to the wheelchair at the end of his bed. He's calm, cool, collected, not going to set off any of the machines still hooked up to him. Carefully, he slips the IV out of his arm and slides into the chair.

Boom. Perfect. Absolutely nothing is going to go wrong.

He makes it halfway to the room next to him before he gets caught. Alright, so maybe it wasn't the most foolproof plan, but he starts yelling at the doctors that he wants to see his crew and the doorway of the room next to him opens. There's a tall kid standing there, looking confused, and beyond him, sitting in another bed, is Niki.

"Hello, Techno!" she cries cheerfully, and Techno grins as he stumbles his way out of the wheelchair and past the kid in the doorway. The doctors all clamor to try and get him to sit back down, but he manages to get his way to the chair next to Niki's bed. Apparently giving up, the doctors just let it happen.

"Niki," he says, trying to force a smile onto his face. "Have you seen anyone else?"

"No," she says. "Well, my brother."

"Hi," the kid leaning in the doorway says. "I'm. Um. Ranboo."

"Ranboo," Techno nods. The kid looks terrified.

"He's a big fan," Niki whispers mischievously. Ranboo looks at her, betrayed. Techno smiles.

He's able to spend the rest of the day there, learns about Ranboo's time in the astronaut training program and gossips with Niki about the whole lung transplant thing. She doesn't seem thrilled about it, but she agrees that the choice is up to George. When visiting hours are over, he goes back to his own room willingly. Maybe tomorrow he'll try the room on the other side of him, see if he can bully the doctors into letting him spend a day with whoever that is.

They let Dream back into George's room after visiting hours that night. Dream is sitting in bed, attempting (and failing) to focus on a crossword puzzle his sister brought him, when a woman he doesn't recognize enters the room.

"Hey," she says. "I'm Alyssa, I'm George's psychologist."

"Hi, Alyssa," Dream says brightly. He's heard a lot about her- all good things. He hopes that she's not there to be *his* psychologist, too, because he feels like that would be a real conflict of interest. "What's going on?"

"Well, after another assessment of George's mental health, and at the personal request of George himself, if you're comfortable with it, we're going to allow the two of you to share a room."

Dream's up and getting into his wheelchair before she even finishes. She laughs and wheels him over to the room next door, where George is looking out the window, clearly bored. He jerks up when he hears the door open and immediately breaks into a grin.

"We're roommates!" he cries gleefully, and Dream wheezes.

"You're such an idiot," he says, and he tries not to let the fondness seep into his voice. He wheels himself over to the bed and manages to shove himself up onto it, landing on George's legs. George lets out a yelp and grabs at Dream's hospital gown, trying to drag him up next to him. Alyssa just watches from the doorway, amused.

"I'll leave you guys to it," she says.

The doctors come back that night to run their final tests, and if they're disgruntled about Dream and George being in the same bed, none of them say anything about it. Instead Skeppy just bids them a good night and leaves them in darkness.

"This is fun," Dream whispers. They're both sitting up, staring at each other, and Dream's probably going to do something stupid if George doesn't say something. Thankfully, he's saved from the embarrassment.

"I miss space," George says softly. "I didn't think I would."

“Oh, come on,” Dream replies. “You knew you would. It’s space.”

“And we were there for long enough,” George reminds him. “I should be happy to be back on Earth.”

“We’re not really back yet, I don’t think,” Dream says, because they’re not. George does that thing where he nods and then his eyes go unfocused, and Dream knows he’s lost in his own head again. It was getting better, back on the ship- George zoned out less and voiced his thoughts more. Being alone for the past couple of days probably hasn’t helped. Thank God, Dream thinks, that Drista told him everything with the house went through smoothly, meaning the two of them are going to be actually living together.

Living. With George. Being domestic and shit. It sounds like a dream come true, honestly, and Dream still doesn’t really believe it’s all real. But it is- it is real, they’re back on Earth, and everything’s going to be okay.

He pulls himself out of his own thoughts at the same time George does, and George smiles at him apologetically.

“Sorry,” he says. “Got lost again.”

“Don’t apologize,” Dream murmurs. “I’ll always be here to bring you back if you need me.”

And oh, he’s about to do something so totally stupid again when there’s a knock on their door and then it’s opening without either of them calling out.

“Hey, lovebirds!” a familiar voice hisses from the doorway, opening it further, and the room is filled with light from the hallway. Sapnap is sitting in a wheelchair, grinning at them. “Heard they were letting you guys room together!”

“You’re definitely not supposed to be in here,” Dream wheezes as Sapnap wheels himself over to the bed. He shoves himself up onto it, collapsing dramatically into both of their arms, and the three of them sit there for a while in silence.

“Overheard the doctors talking about a lung transplant,” Sapnap says, craning his neck from where it is in Dream’s lap to look up at George. “That true?”

“I decided not to,” George says, shaking his head. “Medicine and oxygen therapy instead, and if it gets worse they told me I won’t have a choice with the transplant.”

“Well, we just won’t let it get worse, then,” Sapnap shrugs. “Easy as that.”

And yeah, Dream thinks, it’s George’s health, but it’s a team effort. They’re in this together. He can tell that George is thinking the same thing. They stay up a while longer, talking with Sapnap, and eventually all three of them start drifting off to sleep.

“You should probably go back to your room,” George yawns. “They’ll yell at you, I think.”

“They won’t let my husband stay the night and I’m lonely,” Sapnap counters. “Besides, Puffy’s snuck into Niki’s room every night this week, I wheeled past her in the hallway.”

“Oh, you’re kidding,” Dream laughs.

“I’m not!” Sapnap says, sitting up indignantly. “She looked me dead in the eyes and said ‘it took you long enough to get exploring, I’ve been moving around since we got here!’”

It makes sense, Dream thinks. George gets a mischievous look on his face.

“Five bucks says now that the mission’s over they’re travelling by the end of the month,” George says. “And I don’t have a lot of money, so no, I’m not betting more.”

“You’re on,” Sapnap says. Dream laughs and wonders if Puffy and Niki are making bets about him and George- not travelling, but getting together. It wouldn’t surprise him, really. He’s been wondering the same thing himself- now that the mission is technically over, he doesn’t know how long he’s going to be able to restrain himself before he confesses to George how he feels.

And how he feels is so, completely, incredibly in love. He already knows that he looks at George like George hung the stars, and really, maybe he did. He hung the stars in Dream’s eyes, at least.

He hung the stars and the Moon and fucking Mars, he made the whole damn universe, he *is* the whole damn universe, and he makes Dream feel some kind of incredible.

God, does Dream want a soft domestic life. He'd never admit it, and the crew would probably laugh at him, but he wants to slow dance with George in their kitchen at three in the morning and run outside in their backyard in the rain and sit on opposite ends of the same couch, feet tangled together and cats on their laps, just basking in each other's presence. God, does he want that. He wonders if it's obvious. Maybe it is. He finds that he doesn't really care.

"What do you think, Dream?" George says, yanking him out of his thoughts. "Do we let Sapnap stay the night?"

"What harm could it do?" he says with a grin. "I'm not the middle spoon, though."

"Of course not, Georgie's the middle spoon," Sapnap says, and when he sees George's look, he adds, "We're the protective ones, remember?"

"Fine," George huffs, rolling his eyes. "But only for tonight, Sapnap. Next time just tell them Karl needs to be here for your mental health. It worked for me."

"Manipulating the doctors," Sapnap whistles as they get settled. "Who knew you'd be so sly, George?"

"I've got all of NASA wrapped around my little finger," George says firmly. "What did you call it, Dream?"

"Pretty privilege," Dream replies instantly, knowing exactly what George is talking about.

"See?" George says, sticking his tongue out at Sapnap. "I've got pretty privilege."

"Sure thing, George," Sapnap says, rolling his eyes at Dream. But it's true, Dream thinks- George is the prettiest goddamn person he's ever seen.

God, he thinks, he's completely and totally whipped. As George settles deeper into his arms,

though, he thinks that maybe that's alright.

The next day, by the grace of some higher power, the doctors aren't mad when they find Sapnap in George's room. Instead, they have the same reaction as when they first found Dream- slight exasperation, then gently telling him to get out.

"Dream, we're going to send you back to your room, too," Skeppy says. Before Dream can protest, he holds up a hand. "Just while we run some tests. Then we're letting you all see each other."

"Yes!" Dream and George both cry at the same time, and it's almost enough to keep George from being disappointed when Dream has to leave the room. Skeppy starts going over his treatments for oxygen therapy, and George tries his best to pay attention, but he's mostly thinking about the crew.

"George," Skeppy says eventually. "Do you want to just go over this tonight?"

"Yes, please," George says with a grin, and Skeppy smiles as he shakes his head.

"Alright," he says, jerking his head toward the door. "Go crazy."

George grins and slides into the wheelchair Skeppy drags up from the foot of the bed and rolls himself into the hallway. Dream is already there, grinning at him. He doesn't have a wheelchair, so he wordlessly offers to push George's. George nods, and they make their way down the hallway to the cafeteria.

"Look what the cat dragged in!" Puffy yells as soon as they're around the corner. She doesn't have a wheelchair, either- none of the rest of the crew does- but they're all sitting on top of various tables instead of in seats and they rush over the second they see the two.

There's a lot that happens at once- everyone sort of converges on them, and everyone is hugging him, and then they're all hugging each other in a giant mash of people and God does it feel good. George can't help but beam as they all pull back after nearly five minutes, readjusting themselves on tables in a giant circle.

“So, they tell you when you’re getting out of here?” Sapnap asks. “Most of us have an end of the week release date.”

“I dunno,” George shrugs. “Hopefully whenever they let the rest of you out, though. I have to keep coming back, I think. They tried explaining my treatment to me and I was just thinking about seeing you guys the whole time.”

The crew laughs, and George soaks it all in. Niki and Puffy look happier than ever, Sapnap is grinning, and Technoblade looks... worried. Concerned. He’s clearly trying to hide it, but George knows the whole crew can see right through him.

It’s the trial. It’s the damn trial, of course it is.

“Has the MIC contacted any of you since we got back?” George asks, and the laughter dies down.

“Not yet,” Techno says, and the rest of the crew shakes their heads as well. “I was assuming the hospital staff wasn’t letting them.”

“Thank God for small mercies,” Puffy huffs.

They spend a good long while in the cafeteria, just talking and laughing with each other, coming up with things they could do now that they’re back on Earth. Around the time that visiting hours end, they’re told to disperse back to their rooms for final tests. They go without complaint, content to have spent the whole day together, and George figures now he’s probably going to have to listen to Skeppy talk.

And talk he does. George doesn’t process half of the information about risks and studies surrounding oxygen therapy and the meds he’s going to be on.

“Since you’re only at risk, we’re not going to have you on oxygen constantly,” Skeppy tells him. “You’ll just come here once a day for a few hours until we deem fit that you don’t need it anymore. Which means your release date is the same as the rest of the crew, as long as nothing comes up between now and then.”

George wants to fist-pump the air, but he holds himself back. Skeppy just smiles. “I’ve also been informed that there’s a very important meeting tomorrow. It’s on NASA grounds, so you won’t

have to go far, and we think the fresh air will be nice.”

“Oh boy,” George says sarcastically. “A very important meeting.”

“Oh, did you just get to that point?” Dream asks, wandering into the room. He flops down on George’s bed, burying his head in George’s lap, and George laughs as he pets Dream’s hair gently. “Yeah, no, they’re talking to us about jobs and stuff. Very exciting.”

“Can’t wait,” George adds. “Thanks, Skeppy.”

“No problem, George,” Skeppy says. “It’s not just jobs. Be prepared for one hell of a media training session, they’re giving you a press conference the day before you’re all released. Two days from now.”

“Great!” Dream says, rolling over so that he’s facing the doctor. “That’s going to be really fun and not at all terrible.” George laughs and pats his head a few times, and Dream grins up at him. Skeppy just smiles as he leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

“I’m sure they won’t force you to do the press conference if you don’t want to,” George says. Before the mission, Dream was notorious for wanting absolutely nothing to do with cameras. Now, however, he just shrugs.

“It’ll be fine,” he says. “What could go wrong?”

Phil sits at the head of the table in the conference room, waiting for everyone else to arrive. Wilbur is already here in the chair closest to the Director, spinning back and forth. Fundy is pacing near the window as he usually is. Bad is on Phil’s other side, typing something on his phone quickly. Quackity is on Wilbur’s other side, also spinning back and forth.

The rest of their party joins them shortly, all of them coming in at the same time. George is the only one in a wheelchair, the rest of them bouncing around like excited kids.

“How was the sun?” Bad asks, putting his phone down and grinning at them.

“Oh, it was brilliant,” George says honestly.

“Apollo is *smiling* upon us,” Dream declares dramatically, taking a seat next to Bad. George wheels himself next to Dream, and Sapnap sits on his other side. Niki, Puffy, and Techno take seats on the other side of the table, Techno and Quackity exchanging a glare. Phil notes this with distaste- he doesn’t want the Commander and the JPL Director holding onto any grudges, considering the MIC is going to be targeting the two of them the most.

“So,” Phil declares. “First and foremost, I’m glad you’re all here safe.” His eyes dart toward Technoblade, his pseudo-son who he hasn’t actually seen since they landed. Techno just nods, eyes down, and Phil knows they’re going to need to have a conversation after this.

“We are, too, Director,” Puffy says, and Phil waves a hand.

“No formalities, I’m Phil to you guys,” he says. “You all already know Wilbur, Bad, Quackity, Fundy.” Fundy casts a glance over when he hears his name being called, then goes back to the laptop he’s balancing in one hand. “So. I’m going to start this by saying all of you- all six of you- are being given six months of paid leave.”

“You’re kidding,” Puffy says.

“I’m not,” Phil says. “The executive board of directors met and almost agreed that six months even wasn’t enough time. At the end of that six months, we’ll reevaluate, but you’re welcome to come back to working at NASA. At that time we can discuss what position exactly you’d all like to hold, but that’s a topic for another time.”

For another time, because they might ban Techno from working at NASA. They might fire Quackity, they might call for Phil’s resignation. And Hell, if one person in the room goes down, Phil thinks, they’re all going to go down. Techno especially- Wilbur already told him if the MIC forces Techno out, Wilbur’s quitting, and Bad told him the same thing. He’s not going to lose the best team NASA has ever had- the MIC is not going to take Techno out. He’s determined. And when Phil Watson is determined, he gets things done.

“In other news,” he continues. “We’d like to hold a press conference tomorrow evening. Any questions have been fully vetted by our media department, so you won’t be unprepared for anything. We have Fundy here to brief you all on what that will entail- and I remind you that press conferences are in your contracts, so there’s no getting out of it.”

Astronauts never want to do press conferences- this group in particular was extremely difficult to wrangle pre-mission for media talks. Now, however, NASA as a whole can't afford to not have them speak, especially with the investigation still going on behind closed doors.

"They're going to be particularly interested in hearing you speak, George, most of the questions are going to be for you," Phil finishes.

"Great," George says sarcastically, rolling his eyes. "Exactly what I want."

"Don't worry," Fundy says tersely. "We've already diverted sixteen authors wanting to write biographies and nearly a hundred and eighty different editorials from around the globe asking for individual interviews. Told them all if you were interested, you would reach out."

"Thank you," George says earnestly. "Because I'm not interested."

"Fundy's going to go over all of the questions with you, then," Phil says, glancing at Wilbur and Bad, then Quackity. "Tell you what and what not to say. You know the drill. We'll get out of your hair."

As soon as they're out of the conference room, Phil gestures, and the three follow him to his office. He sits down behind his desk, and the other three remain standing.

"I know that face," Wilbur says. "What's going on?"

"Email from the Martian Investigations Committee," Phil says. "They wanted to talk to the crew while they're still in the hospital. I refused. They're being called in for interviews the day after they get released."

"And us?" Wilbur asks. "They haven't talked to us yet."

"They've talked to me plenty," Quackity snorts. He raises his voice an octave and says, "'What could you have done differently on this? What could you have done differently on that?'" He drops his voice again, clearly annoyed. "He got home, didn't he?"

“They’re not just coming after you, Quackity, don’t worry,” Phil says. “The email they just sent says that if they find anyone on the crew guilty, they’re going to publicly call for my resignation.”

“They’re not,” Wilbur says, looking aghast. Bad sends him a strong look, which Wilbur returns.

“See, I know that face,” Phil says, repeating Wilbur’s words from earlier. “What?”

“We, er, made a decision,” Wilbur says. “If Techno goes down, we’re both resigning. So I suppose we’ll all be in this together.”

“I know,” Phil says. “You both told me.”

“If they force you out, they’re forcing all of us out, Phil,” Quackity says. “We stand with you, no matter what.”

“I can’t let you guys do that,” Phil says, shaking his head. “If I’m gone, I need to know that NASA is going to be left in safe hands.”

“We have safe hands, Phil,” Quackity points out. “I’ve got a new assistant director that I feel fully comfortable leaving JPL in the hands of.”

“Is it Jack Manifold?” Wilbur asks, breaking the tense moment to look over eagerly.

“It is Jack Manifold,” Quackity confirms, and Wilbur cheers quietly before turning back to Phil.

“We’ve got a good group of people here to leave NASA in the hands of, Phil,” Bad says firmly. “And we’ll make sure during whatever trial or hearing they call that they *know*, both the MIC and the public, that if one of us goes down, we’re all going down.”

Phil thinks about it for a moment. If the MIC really wants to take out all of NASA’s leadership, the team that got George home, well- the public wouldn’t be too thrilled about that, he doesn’t think.

“Alright,” he says. “I guess we’re in this together. Keep your eyes peeled for emails, boys, because we’re going to have to take this beast on head-on.”

Chapter End Notes

come vibe with me on [twitter](#)!!!

comments/etc are always always always appreciated!!!

Aphrodite

Chapter Notes

oops chapter count went up

as usual, did not proofread, did not edit, please kindly ignore any mistakes

thank you to everyone on twitter who helped me come up with questions for the press conference when i was at a loss and thank you eve evakt for being a bamf

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“We are coming to you live from NASA’s headquarters in Houston, where the crew of the Ares III mission to Mars is currently waiting to begin their press conference. This is the first time any of the crew’s six members will be seen since we received brief glimpses of them after they landed several days ago. It will be the crew’s first official public appearance with them all together since they first took off more than two and a half years ago. Joining us today will be Commander Technoblade, Major Nick Sapnap, Doctor Clay Bloque, Doctor Niki Nihachu, Captain Cara Puffy, and of course, Doctor George Davidson.”

Fundy paces back and forth in his office. There are fourteen different television screens, each playing a different news station, and most of them are saying the same thing. He needs to go down to the press conference within the next few minutes, where he’ll be fielding questions from reporters. Even though the questions have already been pre-approved, they’re letting the reporters ask to make it feel more natural.

This is probably one of the biggest events of his career, and that’s saying something. He thinks he should be getting paid more just for putting up with all of this, because he certainly feels exhausted enough to retire now.

It’ll be fine, he thinks- Wilbur, Phil, and Bad are all going to be there, off to the side, along with most of Fundy’s media and communications team. All Fundy has to do is stand on stage and facilitate. Easy enough. It was the organization of the event that was killer- every news source and their mother wanted access to the event, but they just don’t have the room for it, so they had to be somewhat picky.

They’ve also been picky about the appearances of the crew, George especially. This is the first time anyone’s getting an actual good look at him since everything went down, and NASA hired a

team of stylists for the whole crew. Naturally, the crew wasn't exactly pleased with this, but Bad reminded them that this was the only press conference they had to do, so they might as well do it right. Techno ordered them to listen, and they went without complaint.

Fundy respects that a lot, a team that listens to each other, that listens to their leader. He supposes the whole 'secret council,' their little group that makes all the decisions, is like that. Except for the fact that they argue more than they get along and rarely listen to each other and alright, maybe they aren't like that, maybe the Ares III crew is what NASA's directors should aspire to be.

It's almost time. Fundy makes his way down to the back hallway outside the conference room. He can hear the buzz already going on inside, reporters talking to each other, eager to gobble up every word the crew says. He takes a few deep breaths to calm his nerves, just like every time he has to go on stage before the nation, before the world, and he enters the room where the crew is waiting.

"Fundy, thank God," someone says immediately, and Fundy nearly groans. He turns to face Antfrost, his vice director of media relations, who looks immensely panicked. "Some people let a whole new batch of questions through."

Fundy stops. Lets all the career-ending disaster scenarios of that statement run through his mind. Says, "Someone *what*?" just in case he didn't hear Antfrost right. Ant just nods. He looks stressed beyond belief, and right now Fundy really wishes someone brought this to his attention sooner, as in, not ten minutes before the press conference soon.

"Okay," he says, trying to do damage control on his own brain. "Do we have a list of the questions, at least?"

"No," Ant replies. Fundy tightens his grip on his clipboard and nearly throws it against a wall.

"Who approved new questions this late? We had a *specific deadline* -"

"Apparently they were some very big names. Like, CNN, NBC, *New York Times*, *Washington Post* big."

Fundy tries not to curse loud enough to be heard across the hall. Instead, he holds up a finger to Ant, turns around, and hisses out "*fuck*" as quietly as he can.

“Alright,” he says, turning back around. “We can handle this. If they’re big names, the questions they’re asking won’t be too out of the blue. We’ve prepared the crew for disaster scenarios. Have you told them yet?”

“Not yet. We were waiting to tell you,” Ant replies. Fundy nods, looks at the crew- Techno is talking to Wilbur quietly, both of them casting glances at Phil, who’s talking with Dream and George. Sapnap and Bad are conversing nearest to them. Niki and Puffy are off in a corner, occasionally looking at Fundy, clearly able to tell that something is wrong.

“Okay, guys, listen up!” Fundy calls. “Apparently someone let a bunch of new questions through, which might mean things you’re unprepared for. If this is the case, I will take the questions myself. We- and by we I mean me- are also making the executive decision to have Phil, Wilbur, and Bad on stage with us.” The three men look at him, completely betrayed, and he shrugs. “Sorry, guys, my domain now. We’re on stage in five. Prepare yourselves.”

He turns back to Ant, leaning in to mutter in his ear. “If things start going south, you signal me, yeah? I can’t always tell from on stage.”

“You got it,” Ant confirms. He slips out of the room, probably to inform the necessary people about the changes, and Fundy continues going through his pre-conference checklist, making sure everything is set before he turns back to the assembled group.

“Alright,” he says. “Here we go. You know the procession order, you know your seats, if anyone at any time needs to tap out of the conference for whatever valid reason, you know the signal. It shouldn’t be necessary, but just in case, I’m completely prepared to end it cold.”

Because he knows that this crew has trauma and any number of things could bring that to the surface, in George especially. And yeah, his job is to make NASA look good, but it’s also to take care of the people in front of him. And Fundy’s going to do his damn job.

Fundy gives them the signal, and they begin the walk on stage. George is in the front row, right in the center (“because everyone wants to see you, George, you’re the star,” Fundy had told them the day before). Niki is on his right and Puffy is on his left; Dream is directly behind him, with Techno on his right and Sapnap on his left. They’re on the left side of the stage, with four chairs set up across from them. They all have microphones equipped near their collars, taken care of by the team of stylists they were bullied into letting look over them.

This is the nicest George has looked in a long time- probably since the last time he had to partake in a press conference. He's a bit nervous, just because he's found that he really, really doesn't like being the center of attention, or being famous, or anything that comes along with being famous. Unfortunately, he's probably just going to have to deal with it.

The room full of reporters applauds as they walk on stage, which George isn't sure if that's normal or not, but it's a thing that's happening. There are a hundred red lights blinking back at him and he takes a few deep breaths, remember what Alyssa told him this morning- pretend it's a video log, but one where you have to censor yourself. Just another video log. One that's going out to the entire world.

They take their seats, Fundy says some introductory words, and then the floor is being turned over to the reporters. George fidgets in his seat, and something hits the back of his chair- he turns back and sees Dream grinning at him, and he smiles back before facing the front again. He can already imagine the lecture they're going to get for that one look.

"What was it like being in space for so long?" is the first question- easy enough, one they've all prepared for, they knew it was going to be asked.

"Everyone in the crew has been to space before," Niki says. She's their designated 'least likely to blow up in a reporter's face so she's taking all the group questions' person, assigned by Fundy the previous day. "But never for that length of time. It was certainly interesting- we all missed Earth a lot, but space has always been something we've always enjoyed. That's why we're astronauts, after all." She gives a polite smile, and George can see why Fundy assigned her this job. He knows that everyone else on the crew would never be able to win the cameras over; they're all too brash. It's not a bad thing, he thinks, it's just who they are as people.

"And George," the same reporter asks. "What was it like living on Mars?"

"I mean, it was- it was Mars," George says with a nod and a smile, and there are laughs from the audience. Okay, he doesn't think it was that funny, but he continues. "It was certainly different. Every day I had to think about every possible scenario and prepare for it, and each little thing was the difference between life and death. Once I was used to it, though, it was pretty easy."

Fundy indicates that it's time for the next question. The palms of George's hands are already sweaty, and he discreetly tries to wipe them on his pants. Dream nudges the back of his chair again.

"Did you think they would come back for you?" the next reporter asks, and George pauses.

“I knew they would do anything in their power to help me,” George says slowly, carefully. This was a predetermined question, he’s just trying to remember exactly what Fundy told him to say. “I wanted them to take care of themselves first and foremost, so no, I didn’t think they would come back for me.”

“What about the rest of the crew? When did you know you were going to go back for him?”

“The second NASA sent us the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver,” Niki says. “We took an official anonymous vote on it first, but of course it came back unanimous. We were willing to do anything in our power to make sure George came home safe.”

The crowd makes a collective ‘aw’ sound. George isn’t sure whether he likes it or not. Fundy gestures for the next question.

“What are you all most looking forward to about being back on Earth? Is there anything specific you want to do or see?”

“I want to see my cat,” Dream says instantly, and there are laughs from the crowd. Dream may hate going up in front of people, George thinks, but he’s sure as hell charismatic. “They haven’t let me see her yet, and that’s what I’m most looking forward to.”

“I am also looking forward to seeing Dream’s cat,” Sapnap says, and there are laughs from the crowd again.

Niki and Puffy both answer they’re just happy to be back with their families, and Techno says, “I actually owe George a beer, so I’m looking forward to buying him that.” There are ‘aw’s from the crowd again, and Techno looks distinctly uncomfortable. George tries to offer him a reassuring smile.

George takes a deep breath. “Spending time with the people I love,” he says. “Being up there made me realize how much I took it for granted before. I’m going to cherish every moment.”

The crowd is silent. Fundy flashes him a discreet thumbs-up. This was another question they practiced the answers to, and the crowd seems to love it.

“What was it like being on the ground during key instances and unable to communicate?”

“Difficult,” Wilbur answers with a charming laugh, and George can practically feel people swoon. “The crew handled everything perfectly, however, and they managed to get themselves home safely and soundly.” He nods, turning it back to the questioners.

“Do you feel disconnected from Earth, now that you’re back?”

“Honestly, we haven’t been here very long,” Niki says, and the rest of the crew nods along with her. “I guess we’ll have to wait and see what it feels like. It’ll certainly be an adjustment.”

“How do you feel like you differ from the person who left Earth?”

Another question they practiced- nothing unexpected so far. George is starting to wonder if there even are any questions that slipped through last minute, though he knows just by thinking that it’ll probably come back to bite.

They all give their answers- this was one of the more detailed questions they had to go through yesterday. George answers honestly- “I’m paranoid. My mental health has certainly been getting better, but it’s definitely worse than when I left Earth.” He’s asked to elaborate on that. He does the best he can, and when he finishes, Fundy’s flashing him another thumbs-up.

“Do you think there were any positives that came from the experience?”

“I would say yes,” Niki says for them, another agreed-upon answer. “Our whole crew has gotten closer as a team and a family.”

“NASA has certainly learned a lot from the experience,” Phil confirms, and there are laughs from the crowd.

“What did that first moment of being reunited feel like?”

“Pure bliss,” Dream jokes.

“Oh, it was awful,” George says immediately after, and the crowd laughs again. “My ribs were broken, I smelled terrible, and the crew had just blown a hole in the ship. It was horribly chaotic. But seeing another person for the first time- that was pretty good.”

“How were you able to find the courage and determination to stay in space long enough to get George back?”

“Because we had to,” Niki replies simply. “He’s part of the crew. When we were presented with the option, not one of us hesitated.”

“I hesitated a little bit,” Technoblade offers. “They wanted to enact the plan right away, but I needed to make sure everyone understood the risks first. But ultimately, the idea of being in space so long meant nothing against the fact that we might have a chance of getting George back.”

The crowd loves this, clearly. It’s another perfect answer that Fundy practically handed to them. Without him, George thinks, the crew definitely would have made a complete mess of things.

“George,” the next reporter starts. “What do you do when you hear Pigstep?”

Laughs from the crowd. This wasn’t one of the questions on the list, but it’s an easy enough answer.

“Oh, I can’t listen to it anymore,” he says, trying to put on an easy grin. Truth is, he hasn’t actually heard it at all since he listened to it on his last day on Mars. The crew has avoided it completely, worried it might trigger something. George is worried, too, honestly, but he’s not about to delve into that here.

“What’s your future with NASA? Do any of you plan on going back to space?”

“NASA’s executive board has given the whole crew six months of paid leave,” Phil answers for them. “After that, we’ll be discussing further career options within the administration.”

The crowd seems satisfied with this answer. George glances back at Dream again- he’s tapping his foot nervously, but he offers a smile when George looks at him.

“We all heard your public eulogies for George. How did you cope with the circumstances of losing your friend and finding out he was alive again?”

“With difficulty,” Niki says. This is a question they weren’t prepared for, but Niki handles it gracefully. “Losing a friend is always hard, but finding out he was alive was something none of us ever expected. It took a while to process.” She nods, indicating she’s done talking. George knows full well that NASA didn’t tell the crew he was alive until well after they had means of communication, and he also knows that that’s probably something NASA doesn’t want getting out to the public. Fundy is giving Niki a thumbs-up. The reporters keep going.

“Was it hard?” the next reporter asks, looking directly at George. “Not giving up?”

George swallows harshly. “Yes,” he says truthfully. “It was extremely hard. Several times I thought I was going to- give up, that is. But the thought of my family, my friends, and the crew kept me going, and here I am.”

He can feel the crowd going wild. Fundy looks extremely pleased.

“This was a highly unnatural mission- did any romances between the crew develop?”

That’s- that’s an unexpected question. George restrains himself from looking back at Dream. Sapnap clears his throat awkwardly, and George can imagine him trying not to smile.

“While romance between crewmates is normally discouraged, we agree that there were extenuating circumstances, so no one in the crew would have been blamed if this were the case,” Bad says formally. “That being said-”

“No romance between crewmates occurred during the mission, no,” Niki says. He hopes none of the reporters notice that he’s gone a bit red in the face. Luckily, they move on quickly.

“Did you feel the pressure of having George’s life in your hands?”

“Literally, yes,” Sapnap laughs. “It was terrifying. Every moment was full of what-ifs, and even though I practiced, it was still scary.”

“Knowing that we were responsible for getting him home was terrifying,” Puffy agrees. “But we had complete faith in NASA, in each other, and in George. And here we are.”

“What did it feel like when you didn’t have contact with NASA, being completely alone in the universe?”

“Well, it didn’t feel good, I can tell you that,” George jokes, and the room laughs along with him. Dream kicks the back of his chair. “It was terrifying. The first time it happened, I didn’t know any different. But it was the second time that really got me, when I had communication with them before but had to readjust to being on my own. I had no idea if the resupply had worked or if anyone was coming for me. It was scary. But I made it through.”

“What was the scariest moment, throughout everything?”

That’s an unexpected question. George actually has to think about it- there were plenty of moments that were terrifying. The rest of the crew answers the question first- they all agree that it was the rescue itself, or finding out George was alone.

“Coming back to Earth,” George answers. “Just before we were about to come back. Because in that moment, if something went wrong, then everything we had worked for wouldn’t have mattered.”

A hush over the crowd. Sapnap is the one to nudge the back of his chair this time.

“Commander Technoblade,” the next reporter begins. “Do you feel that any mistakes were made that could have been avoided?”

Another unexpected question. The crew turns back to look at Techno, who’s clearly struggling to keep his eyes from going wide.

“I think given the circumstances, everyone involved did the best they could,” he settles on eventually. The reporter opens his mouth, like he’s about to ask another question, and Fundy interrupts quickly.

“We’re going to move on to the next question, please,” he says. The next question is directed at George, and he silently prepares to answer.

“How did you manage the journey back to Earth with the crewmates who left you behind?”

That- that is not what he thought was going to come out of this reporter’s mouth. He stares for a moment, completely in shock and a little bit in horror, and then he says, “They didn’t leave me behind. My bio-monitor was completely broken, so they had perfectly valid reason to think I was dead. Commander Technoblade made the call that saved all of our lives in the end. They did not leave me behind. I didn’t *manage* anything. I travelled home with my family.”

He can’t stop his voice from going cold, but he’s starting to get sick of this, and the next question doesn’t help.

“Did you ever want the crew to leave you there to make sure they got themselves home safe?”

How the hell is he supposed to answer that?

Easy. With the truth.

“Yes,” he says simply. “Every damn day.”

Silence.

“I think that’s where we’re going to end things for today,” Fundy says quickly, nervously. He keeps talking, but George doesn’t hear him. All the blood is rushing to his ears and he’s getting lost in thought again, because holy shit, he *did* want them to leave him there. He did want them to put their own safety before his, of course he did, he was fully prepared to die as long as it meant his crew would be safe.

They’re standing now, Puffy’s hand is on his and he gets to his feet, follows her off stage, and the second they’re in the hallway she whirls around and throws herself into his arms. Someone slams into him from behind- Niki- and his stream of consciousness is abruptly ended.

“You would’ve done the same for us, George,” Puffy says firmly. “Without hesitation.”

“I know,” he says, softly. “But I didn’t want you to have to-”

“We didn’t *have* to do anything,” Sapnap says firmly. Niki and Puffy have let go of him now, moving back to let the others into the hallway. Sapnap claps a hand on George’s shoulder, and Technoblade nods. “We did it because we wanted to. We *mutinied* for you, George, and that should tell you something about how much we wanted to do it.”

Dream is standing behind them, a small smile on his face, and George knows this is something they’re going to talk about later, something he’s going to have to talk about with Alyssa. But for now, Bad bursts into the hallway filled with something akin to rage, muttering about invasive reporters and lack of privacy. Wilbur and Phil follow him, and Fundy exits last, closing the door firmly and ushering them into the room they were in before the conference started.

“Okay,” Fundy says. “Okay, so from now on I’ll make sure everyone knows all questions go through *me* first, not just anyone- is everyone okay?”

He’s looking directly at George. They’re all looking directly at George, and George wants to shrink into the wall behind him and disappear. Possibly forever. Instead, he just nods. Dream slips past Sapnap to rest easily next to him, and George lets their fingers brush.

“Okay,” Fundy says. “Okay. Um, in that case- Technoblade, Sapnap, you guys handled everything great. Dream and George, please be aware that any looks you send each other are being broadcast on international television. Niki and Puffy-”

“We’re both fine,” Niki says, and she’s leaning against Puffy’s side. “That was tiring. I don’t like talking to people.”

“You did wonderful,” Fundy reassures her. “You all did wonderful, you’re all amazing. All of you. Thank you.”

George smiles and leans against Dream, because alright, this is an okay end to the evening. And they’re going to go back to their little hospital ward and ignore the commentary on the press conference and George will fall asleep in Dream’s arms, almighty Aphrodite watching over them, and even despite how horrible he felt just moments ago, he knows things are going to be okay.

Roughly fourteen hours later, things do not seem like they are going to be okay.

“They want to *what* ?” George says. He’s still wrapped in Dream’s arms and blinking sleep from his eyes, and Wilbur has just given them the worst news George has heard in a while. The MIC wants them in for interviews the day after they get out of the hospital. Wilbur repeats as much.

“Be lucky that we managed to convince them not to interview you while you were still in the hospital, they wanted to the second you were awake,” he adds.

Everyone is gathered in George’s room, five of them piled on one bed and Technoblade sitting in the chair off to the side. He looks immensely unimpressed at everything that’s going on, and George feels the same way.

“Fine,” Sapnap shrugs. “Let them. But don’t blame us if they don’t like what they find.”

“Trust me, we don’t like it anymore than you do,” Wilbur reassures them. “Anyways. Techno, Phil’s in your room, he wants to talk to you. The rest of you- I dunno, I guess the doctors stopped caring about where you are.”

“Nah, we just make their job too difficult,” Dream says, and the crew laughs. Wilbur just rolls his eyes.

“Well, take care of yourselves,” he says. “I’ll be back later.”

“I will, too,” Techno says, getting up from the chair. “I’ll let you know what he says.”

The other five relax- they were definitely going to eavesdrop otherwise. George thinks they probably would’ve sent Puffy to stand outside the door and listen in.

“See you in a bit, Commander,” Sapnap says with a mock salute, and Techno actually salutes back before he leaves the room. George leans back against Dream’s chest, notices the way Niki and Puffy are wrapped around each other, and then sees that Sapnap is holding Dream’s hand. Even with one of their team out of the room, they’re completely united.

The MIC has no idea what's coming.

Technoblade slips back into his own room to find Phil sitting in the chair next to his bed. He clears his throat when Techno enters, and neither of them say anything for a moment.

"So," Phil says. "Where are you going when you get released?"

Techno knows why he's asking- he was living in an apartment before he went off to space, but he didn't want to pay lease on a place he wasn't living in, so he put all of his stuff in Phil's house, just like every time he left Earth.

"The crew's moving in to a nice neighborhood," Techno says, shrugging. "There are condos down the street. I'm moving into one of those."

Because even if he isn't as codependent as the rest of the crew is (and they'd probably get offended if they knew he thought that), he still wants to be near them. You don't spend two and a half years with the same five people and then suddenly not want to be around them.

"Do you need help moving in?" Phil asks cautiously. No, Techno doesn't need it, but of course he wants it. Of course he wants to spend time with Phil, even if the guy is still pissed at him over the whole mutiny thing.

"Sure," he says, and Phil smiles. It feels like an olive branch, of sorts. They both wait for a moment- they both know that neither of them are going to apologize. They were both doing what they thought was right. Techno, at least, knows that he has nothing to be sorry for.

"I wish I knew what was going on in your head," Phil says eventually.

"I wish you would've told us things when they happened," Techno responds. "Let me make the tough decisions so you didn't have to."

"Tough decisions are my job, Tech."

“They’re mine, too.”

They stare each other down for a moment. Phil concedes first.

“The MIC wants to pin the blame on someone,” he says. “And they’ve chosen you.”

“I know,” Techno replies, trying to keep his voice even. “My crew isn’t going to let me down.”

“And neither is mine,” Phil says. “If they find you guilty, they’re calling for my resignation. Wilbur, Bad, Fundy, and Quackity have all agreed that if I resign, they’re resigning. That’s eleven of NASA’s best taken out if one of us goes down.”

It’s a comforting thought, almost, that there are so many people on his side. Techno doesn’t want *any* of them to go down if he does, and he tells Phil as much.

“Well, you don’t really have a choice, mate,” Phil says. “We’re standing or falling with you whether you like it or not.”

The rest of the week practically flies by, and the next thing Sapnap knows, his husband is picking him up from NASA’s headquarters and driving him to their new home. He and Karl leave at the same time as the others- Niki’s brother is driving her and Puffy to their place, Dream’s mother is taking him and George, and Phil Watson himself is driving Technoblade. Sapnap is, needless to say, thrilled that the entire crew took him up on his offer of moving in nearby.

The house is magnificent, and he forces Karl to let him carry him over the threshold bridal style. They’re both laughing the whole time, and Sapnap sets him down carefully and looks around the house in awe.

“It’s perfect,” he says, turning back to Karl. “It’s home.” And Sapnap picks Karl up and spins him around in their new living room and they’re both laughing, and God, it feels good to be back on Earth.

They go over to Dream and George's house next door after a few hours. Sapnap already has a spare key, so he lets them both in, and they navigate their way around the house until they find its two occupants. There they are, both of them laying on the couch, fast asleep. George is completely on top of Dream, and they're holding hands.

"Jesus," Karl says, pretending to gag, and Sapnap laughs and ushers him back out of the house before they wake the two lovebirds up. They go over to Niki and Puffy's instead, and find the two women making dinner, Technoblade already sitting in their kitchen and talking with three kids that Sapnap barely recognizes. Well, they're hardly kids, but compared to the seasoned astronaut they're sitting next to, they sure look like it.

"Oh, we're having a whole party now?" Niki says, but she doesn't sound mad. "Shoes off at the door!" Sapnap and Karl both oblige, and then introduce themselves to the three kids.

"Don't worry, we know who you are," one of them says loudly, elbowing Technoblade.

"This is Tommy," Techno says, rolling his eyes, and realization dawns on Sapnap that this is the scrawny kid from three years ago who shoved Techno's face into a bowl of mashed potatoes. He places one of the other kids quickly- Ranboo, Niki's younger brother, astronaut trainee (or maybe he's graduated from the program by now).

"I'm Tubbo," the final kid says brightly. "Astrodynamics."

"Hang on," Sapnap says. "Tubbo *Underscore*?"

"Yep," Tubbo says brightly. "I'm Puffy's half-brother."

"You're related to Puffy?" Sapnap asks, and all three kids burst into laughter.

"I told you they didn't know!" Puffy calls from the other room.

They continue chatting for a while, and eventually Dream and George make their way over. They show no signs of knowing that Sapnap and Karl broke into their house, and Sapnap doesn't plan on telling them. They eat dinner together, like a family, and when he and Karl return home that night, it's the happiest he's felt in ages.

“So, space man,” Karl asks that night as they’re getting into bed. “Is Earth everything you thought it would be?”

“Everything and more,” Sapnap tells him honestly, and he’s beaming.

Chapter End Notes

oh my god a chapter with a nice ending??? crazy

wonder what's coming next

:)

[twitter](#)

[spotify playlist](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated!

Homonoia

Chapter Notes

man this chapter did not want to come lmao anyways. anyways all names of the MIC people are taken from the original book

also! [mars](#) made a [FYTS quote bot](#)!!! go check that out on twitter!! while you're there you should also check out [me](#) on twitter lmao ha ha ha /nf

anyways enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The day after the Ares III crew is released from the hospital, Phil makes his way down to the offices being used as the headquarters for the Martian Investigations Committee. They're scheduled for interviews around the same time, so at least he'll be able to chat with Wilbur while the MIC is deciding his fate, or whatever it is they're doing today.

Wilbur and Fundy both join him in the elevator, muttering to each other. Fundy's got a tablet that Phil hasn't seen before, and he's drawing on it with a stylus. They both look up and grin at Phil when they realize he's there, and he's immediately filled with suspicion.

"What are you planning?" he asks. The elevator doors close, and it begins its descent.

"A little housewarming party for Techno," Wilbur says gleefully. "Or, condo-warming, I guess. Just the family."

Phil knows damn well that 'just the family' means everyone and their mothers are going to be shoved into Technoblade's tiny-ass condo (he would know the size, he helped Techno move in) and it's going to end in pure chaos. That's a problem for a different time.

"If anyone asks, I wasn't involved with the planning, but I can get you the garage code," he mutters. Wilbur holds out a hand for a fist-bump. Phil obliges.

The elevator stops a few floors away, and Bad and Quackity both shove themselves in, both looking disgruntled.

“My flight left at three in the damn morning and I didn’t remember it until I was shooting out of bed at one-thirty,” Quackity says, and Phil nods. That explains the bags under his eyes. He looks to Bad.

“Oh, I just don’t want to be here,” Bad says cheerfully. “Why are you here, Fundy? I didn’t think they were interviewing you.”

“They’re not,” Fundy shrugs. “I’m just coming for the hell of it.”

“Why?” Quackity snorts. “They’ll probably pull you in anyways, ask you to shit on us for fun.”

“Watch your language when we’re in there,” Phil snorts. The elevator comes to a stop on the correct floor, and the small group makes their way out. “We need to be polite. Pretend you’re on TV. Because there’s a good chance this might end up on TV.”

“Yes, sir,” Quackity says sarcastically. They march down the hallway, seeing very few people as they go, and eventually they make their way into a large, open space. Several people are already waiting, milling about and talking to each other, some of them expected, some of them not.

The Ares III crew is all present, Dream currently laying down across three chairs with Puffy, George, and Niki all sitting on top of him. Sapnap is sitting on the ground, listening in on their conversation. Technoblade is talking quietly with Tommy and Tubbo in a corner. All conversations quickly die when Phil leads his group into the room. Phil nods, and the conversation resumes. Technoblade, Tommy, and Tubbo approach Wilbur, Phil, and Fundy quickly, as Bad and Quackity join in on the rest of the crew’s conversation.

“What are you doing here?” Wilbur asks, and Tommy grins at him.

“I got called in to see if anyone could have noticed George was alive sooner, probably,” Tommy says.

“I don’t know why I’m here,” Tubbo shrugs. “They emailed me a while ago and I forgot about it until now.”

“Well, congratulations, we may all lose our jobs today,” Fundy snorts.

“Don’t say that, we won’t lose them until this all goes public, at least,” Wilbur counters. Phil glances at Techno- he’s frowning deeply.

“We may have to do it all again,” he says, voice low. “There’s a chance they’ll court martial me, and you’d probably all be called to testify.”

“And we’ll defend you to the end, mate,” Phil says. Technoblade is about to respond when a door opens and a few people walk out.

“Thank you for being here with us today,” one of the representatives says.

“Not like we had a choice,” Sapnap mutters. There are snickers from the crew, and sharp looks from everyone else. The MIC representatives don’t say anything.

“We’re going to be taking you in a few at a time, the whole process should take around an hour,” another representative says. “You’re welcome to stay here and wait for your coworkers being interviewed. We’d like to start with Dr. Nihachu, Major Sapnap, and Captain Puffy, if that’s possible.”

The three astronauts make their way toward the representatives, and they’re led into different rooms. Everyone else waits for a tense moment before conversation begins again. Dream sits up, keeping George on his lap, and Technoblade sits down next to them. Phil sends Techno a look, then glances at Dream and George. Techno shakes his head. Alright, so they’re not together, then- yet.

Everyone settles down into the chairs, looking at each other quietly. Phil clears his throat to try and cleanse the room of its silence. It doesn’t work. Everyone is stressed, he can feel it in the air- they can’t slip up and say the wrong thing, or the MIC will be on all of their asses.

And Phil knows- he knows news isn’t going to get out about the mutiny. Those conversations were all held off the record- there’s no documentation of any of it. But if they were to find out about that part, it would easily end all of their careers, no decision making needed. Cover-ups are never good for government agencies, even small ones.

Alright, he supposes, it's a rather large one. But still.

"So," Wilbur says, breaking the silence, looking at Dream and George. "How was the move-in?"

"Oh, it was great," Dream nods. "The house is amazing, the cats are coming tomorrow, we're just hoping they get along."

Wilbur nods, then asks another question, and Phil can tell by the tone of his voice that this is what he's really been wanting to ask.

"You know they're going to ask you about this, right?" he says, gesturing to the two of them and the position they're in. "They're going to question your relationship heavily. And it's not going to help if they subpoena George's emails or video logs."

"What does that have to do with it?" George asks.

"You talk about Dream a lot in the logs," Techno points out.

"Okay, so?" George says defensively. "We're not- we're not *together* or anything, and even if we were it's not like it was happening during the mission."

Techno clears his throat. Dream goes a bit red in the face.

"What?" Phil asks, his heart sinking.

"Due to medical reasons," Techno starts, and Phil already doesn't like where this is going, "I did permit Dream and George to share a bed."

"Oh my God," Fundy mutters, sinking down into his chair. Phil knows what he's thinking- thank God the press didn't get ahold of that information.

"Medical reasons," George emphasizes. "Because I couldn't go more than twenty minutes alone without losing my shit, they've got to understand that-"

“Oh, they’ll understand,” Bad says sarcastically. “They don’t care about your health, George, they care about taking us all down. They’re determined now.”

“Well, they can get Techno,” Tommy interrupts. “What are they going to do about the rest of you?”

Phil and Wilbur exchange a glance. Phil clears his throat awkwardly.

“See, funny thing,” Wilbur says. “If they find Technoblade guilty, they’re going to call for Phil’s resignation.”

“Surely not,” Tubbo says, looking aghast.

“And if Phil is forced to resign, the rest of us are going to, as well,” Wilbur finishes.

“All of you?” Tommy asks, glancing around. Bad, Fundy, and Quackity all nod.

“No,” Techno says immediately. “No, you can’t- if I go down I’m not taking all of you with me-”

“So don’t go down,” George says firmly, and everyone looks at him. “Fight your damn best. And know that if you do go down, we’re all standing by your side. We support you, Commander.”

Techno shakes his head again. Phil knows exactly what he’s thinking.

“Just accept it, mate,” he says. “Family, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Techno agrees, swallowing harshly.

They wait for a while longer, and eventually, Puffy is the first to emerge. She doesn’t look very pleased. The interviewer asks them to wait for a moment, and everyone leans in as Puffy sits down.

“Well?” George asks. “How’d it go?”

She laughs humorlessly, shaking her head. “They asked a lot of biased questions,” she says. “Trying to get me to pin the blame on someone. I wouldn’t, so they started attacking me personally. Asking about Niki and stuff. I just told them to piss off, I don’t think they liked that very much.”

“Be careful or they’ll start going after you too,” Techno snorts. Puffy just shakes her head again.

“Director Bad?” the interviewer calls, and Bad stands up. He waves goodbye as he goes, looking like he’s being marched to his death. Niki emerges, looking just as displeased as Puffy had, and Quackity is called in after her.

“That was horrible,” she grumbles, taking Puffy’s hand. “Techno this, Techno that, they asked me to describe Sol 6 in detail, which wasn’t pleasant.”

“Oh, God,” George mutters.

“They weren’t very pleased that we didn’t know about the storm, either, even though none of us are meteorologists and no one knew how bad the storm was until it was almost upon us,” Niki huffs. “Overall, I would say I do not like them very much.”

“Did they say anything about the fact that none of us would respond to their emails?” Dream asks.

“None of you would what?” Phil says sharply.

“Oh, yeah,” Technoblade says. “Didn’t tell you about that one. We made a collective decision to ignore them while we were on *Hermes*. ”

“Oh my God,” Phil mutters. The crew exchanges half-smiles, and Dream holds back a laugh. “You know you’re just making it worse for yourself, right?”

“Oh, I know, believe me,” Techno says, rolling his eyes. Sapnap comes out of his room, and Wilbur is called back. Phil grabs his wrist as he passes.

“Good luck,” he says, and Wilbur nods.

“That sucked,” Sapnap says, throwing himself onto the ground at Dream’s feet. He raises his voice an octave in mimicry. ““So, Nick, as the mission pilot, did you feel pressured by Technoblade to launch before confirming George was dead or alive?”” He drops his voice again. “I told them to call me Sapnap, like, twelve times. They kept making stuff up and I was like no, that didn’t happen, it was horrible.”

“Yeah, they did that to me too,” Puffy snorts. “Phil, who hired these people?”

“Not me,” Phil says. “I don’t even know where they came from, that’s the legal department’s job.”

They continue talking, the three who were already interviewed preparing the others, and eventually, Tommy and Tubbo are called back as Wilbur and Bad emerge.

“Shit sucks,” Wilbur announces. “Quackity still in there?”

“They’re probably having a go at JPL,” Phil shrugs. It’s another twenty minutes before Quackity comes back, and he looks thoroughly disgruntled. “How was it?”

“Don’t even get me started,” he snorts.

“Director Watson?”

Phil stands up, glancing back at the others. Wilbur salutes. “Wish me luck,” he says, and he marches after the interviewer into the office.

George wants to get up and pace back and forth, but he’s extremely comfortable in his position

against Dream's chest. It's just him, Dream, and Technoblade that need to be interviewed now. He wonders how long it'll take, how much of his trauma they're going to make him relive. He's about to voice this to Dream when one of the doors opens and Tubbo comes bounding out, looking, quite frankly, disgusted.

"Doctor Bloque?" the interviewer calls, and George groans as Dream shoves him ungracefully off his lap.

"Have fun!" George says, and Dream rolls his eyes. Tubbo sits down on the floor next to Sapnap with a huff.

"They asked me why I didn't come up with the maneuver sooner to give officials more time to decide what to do," Tubbo complains. "As if I wasn't already staying up until three in the morning regularly! Who are these people? And then they wanted to know if I was in contact with anyone on the *Hermes* at all, I think-"

He drops his voice.

"I think they're suspicious of the whole mutiny thing, but they don't have any proof."

"Thank muffin for that," Bad says. "Otherwise I have a feeling I'd be out of a job right away."

"Nah, someone else would take the fall for you," Wilbur says. "Phil, probably, they've already gone after him."

"Well, we're all going down either way," Quackity points out. "What does it matter?"

Another door opens, and Tommy comes out this time.

"Commander Technoblade?"

Great. Of course George is last. He watches as Tommy high-fives Techno as they pass each other, and Techno disappears. It's another fifteen minutes before Phil comes back, looking like he wants to punch someone in the face.

“Good luck, George,” he mutters as he sits down next to Wilbur. George swallows harshly and stands up.

“Doctor Davidson?”

He approaches the woman interviewing him quickly, and she smiles kindly at him. It doesn't reach her eyes. She gestures into the room, and he takes a seat at the table. Other than that, the room is mostly empty. The door closes behind them, and the interviewer sits down, setting her clipboard on the table.

“My name is Melissa Lewis, I'm going to be interviewing you today,” she says. “I'm going to be recording this interview so we can come back to it and review it, if that's alright with you?” She says it like he has a choice. He just shrugs. “Excellent. So, let's begin. Can you please state your name, title, and job on the Ares III crew for the record?”

“Doctor George Davidson, botanist and engineer,” he says, leaning forward a bit. Lewis smiles at him again.

“Excellent,” she says. “Now, I'm going to be asking you questions about your time in space, both on Mars and afterward. If you need to stop at any time, please let me know.”

George nods. She looks down at her clipboard- a list of questions- and begins.

“Can you describe what occurred on Sol 6 for me? Again, please take your time.”

“Of course,” George says. “Um. We were alerted to a storm with winds that may have tipped our MAV, so Technoblade ordered us to abandon the mission, as we were trained to do. We suited up, and when we went outside, visibility was already extremely low. A communications dish had been knocked loose by the wind, and it hit me in the stomach. I went flying, and I passed out shortly after. When I woke up, I was covered in dust maybe sixty meters away from where I was hit.”

“And your biomonitor had been pierced?”

“Yeah, it was completely broken. The crew had perfect reason to think I was dead, as I've

emphasized. It would have reported data at zero the second it broke.”

“Alright. Tell me about your injury.”

George has no idea how this is relevant to anything, but he does.

“The antennae of the communications dish had pierced my suit and my stomach. Thankfully, the blood had congealed, sealing my suit and keeping oxygen in. I had a knife on my person that I used to cut the wire of the antennae and made my way back into the Hab, where I did emergency surgery to remove it, and I was able to stitch it up after.”

“I imagine that was very painful.”

“You imagine correctly,” he says dryly.

“So, there was no way for the crew to know you were alive?”

“Other than searching for me in a dust storm with little-to-no visibility, no,” George says. “And I wouldn’t have wanted them to do that. If any of them had kept searching any longer than they did, the MAV would have tipped and we all would have been stuck, or Sapnap would’ve had to launch without other crew members. Again, it was the ideal scenario that they left. I was presumed dead, and I don’t blame any of them in the slightest.”

He emphasizes his last point heavily. Lewis frowns and looks down at her clipboard.

“So you don’t believe Commander Technoblade abandoned the search for you too soon?”

“No, I don’t,” George says stiffly, shaking his head. “He did what was best for the crew. He did his job as a Commander.”

“You can be truthful with me, Doctor Davidson. Your crew isn’t here to judge you. None of them will know what you said.”

“I am being truthful,” George says, and he can feel his tone getting more hostile, but he doesn’t care. “Technoblade did his job, and he did it how I would have wanted if I had been conscious at the time.”

“So you wanted them to leave you behind?”

“I- no, of course not, but Technoblade did his job as Commander, he needs to make tough calls-”

“You didn’t want to be left behind?”

“No, who would?”

“So do you blame Technoblade for leaving you behind?”

“NO!” George yells, slamming his hands down. Lewis smiles slightly, like this is exactly what she wanted. George takes a few deep breaths. “No, I didn’t want to be left behind, and *no*, I don’t blame Technoblade for *anything*. The crew left me behind because they thought I was dead and if they didn’t leave, they would have died too. I don’t know why this is so *hard* for you people to understand.”

“Doctor Davidson, I’m going to have to ask you to calm down,” Lewis says slowly. George huffs and crosses his arms, sitting back in the chair. “Thank you. Now. How was it being back on the *Hermes* ?”

“It was *Hermes*. I was in space. I love space, I love my crew, I don’t know what else you want me to say.”

“It wasn’t difficult interacting with the crew?”

“It would have been difficult interacting with anyone,” George says honestly. “I was completely alone for eighteen months talking only to a camera. It was hard for me to remember that sometimes, but the crew helped me to the best of their ability.”

“I see. Was Doctor Nihachu able to care for you properly?”

“Absolutely,” George says, and he doesn’t like the direction this is going. “Without her, I most likely would have developed pulmonary fibrosis or hypertension and would have needed a lung transplant. I’m very grateful that she was there.”

“What about Doctor Bloque? I noticed that the two of you seem very close. You moved in together, didn’t you?”

“Yes, ma’am. Dream- Doctor Bloque is my best friend.”

“Just a friend.”

George huffs. “Yes, just a friend. And I don’t know what that has to do with anything. I’m very good friends with everyone in the crew.”

“Did you ever doubt that they would really come back for you?”

“Once I knew it was a possibility, not for a second.”

“Do you know how the crew came by the plans for the Tubbo Underscore Maneuver?”

“I was told they were sent the plans by NASA officials after a decision had been made regarding the Maneuver,” George answers. He’s not lying, he’s just omitting part of the truth- being that the decision was a negative.

“And are you aware that the rest of your crewmates did not respond to emails sent by the Martian Investigations Committee during your time on the *Hermes* ?”

“I was aware of this, yes. It was a collective decision.”

“A collective decision?”

“Are *you* aware, Ms. Lewis, that I told Wilbur while I was still on Mars that I wasn’t going to participate in your witch-hunt?” George says harshly. “Because those were damn near my exact words. I am not going to let you take down my crew. It was none of their faults. It was not JPL’s fault. It was not Technoblade’s fault. If you want to blame something, blame a dust storm on Mars.”

“I see.” The corners of Lewis’s lips are downturned, and she stands up abruptly. “This interview is not over, but I will be pausing the tape recorder. Please wait here.”

George nods, and Lewis leaves the room. He catches a glimpse of his friends, clearly waiting for him- Dream stands up when Lewis exits, and then the door shuts.

Five minutes pass, and George is able to calm himself down enough that he could probably answer more questions without blowing up in someone’s face. Ten minutes pass and he starts fidgeting, foot tapping quickly against the ground. Fifteen minutes pass and someone outside starts yelling, saying that George can’t be left alone for long periods of time. He gets up to open the door and finds several people standing immediately outside- two men are holding Dream back as he yells at Lewis.

George’s heart drops, because he hates hearing Dream in pain, and that’s what he sounds like right now. He wants to shove all these people aside and dive into Dream’s arms, but he knows he can’t.

“Are we almost done here?” George asks, fighting to keep his voice sounding bored, and Dream instantly relaxes. Lewis turns around, a tight smile on her face.

“Yes, I believe we’re done,” she says. She turns back to the room as a whole. “If we have any further questions, we’ll let you all know.”

She steps to the side, and George goes barrelling into Dream. Dream wraps his arms around George protectively, and George can practically feel his glare being directed at the MIC representatives.

“You okay?” Dream murmurs, and George nods against his chest.

“Fine,” he says. “Let’s go- do my oxygen therapy and go home.”

No one sticks around for very long- they all just want to get the hell out of there. Phil and the other

directors murmur about holding a meeting to debrief, and Sapnap offers to have the crew over for dinner. George just keeps his hold on Dream's hand, letting it ground him, as they make their way towards the hospital area.

He's on oxygen for two hours, Dream laying in the bed next to him. Skeppy puts on a movie for them to watch, and George is nodding off by the time it's over. Dream drives them home and God, it feels domestic, and George can almost forget the things that Lewis said to him, the anger boiling in his gut.

"What's wrong?" Dream asks, glancing over. They're pulling into the garage, and he stops the car. "I can tell something's wrong."

"They just- kept trying to get me to blame Techno," George shrugs. "Or JPL, or someone. I don't know. It's like they want me to be on their side, but they were purposefully working me up, and I- I yelled at her, and that's not going to look good."

"No," Dream murmurs, reaching over the console to grip his hand. "But it's going to be okay. No matter what happens, we'll be okay."

They get the news the next day, when they've just started making breakfast. George sits on the couch and puts on the TV, and Dream starts heating up the stove to make pancakes, and one of their cellphones starts ringing. Dream picks it up before George can even get off the couch, and it puts it on speaker.

"Don't turn on the news," Sapnap's voice says, and George immediately scrambles for the remote to change the channel. He makes enough noise that Sapnap says, "I just said don't-"

George hits the button and turns up the volume. CNN starts blasting through their house, breaking news, that Commander Technoblade of the Ares III crew is being put on trial. *NASA v. Technoblade* hearings will proceed in the coming weeks.

George drops the remote. Sapnap says he has to go, there's a lawyer calling him. George's own phone starts ringing moments later. He ignores it in favor of calling Technoblade, and Dream sits down next to him on the couch.

"Yeah, I know," Techno says when he picks up the phone. "Phil just called me."

“We stick with you, Commander,” George says firmly. “No matter what.”

“No matter what,” Dream echoes, and Techno snorts.

“Yeah, yeah,” he says. “Don’t make any legal statements, or anything. That’s what the lawyers are going to tell you. I know you support me no matter what. Nerds.”

“Love you, Technoblade,” Dream says teasingly. His cell phone is still sitting on the counter, ringing furiously, and as soon as George hangs up his own starts ringing as well. He just leans into Dream’s arms, and Dream presses his lips to the top of George’s head.

“We’re going to be okay,” Dream murmurs again. “No matter what.”

“No matter what,” George echoes. Homonoia is on their side, he thinks, the spirit of unanimity, harmony; the MIC will not defeat them. They are one.

The phone rings louder. George pulls away from Dream’s grip so he can answer.

He keeps their hands entwined.

Chapter End Notes

as always,

[twitter](#)

[spotify playlist](#)

[quote bot](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated!!! i read and love every single comment

so much

Praxidike

Chapter Notes

wOOOOOOO sorry it's been a hot minute this chapter didn't want to come and then i got pissed about irl stuff so here you go :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There are a lot of rules that come with legal proceedings, it turns out. The whole crew is ordered not to give any press statements or even appear in public- they're essentially shut in their houses, apart from when George and Dream go to NASA's building for George's oxygen therapy.

Of course, the crew has never been one for following rules. Instead of getting family to do their grocery shopping or errand-running for them, like they're advised to do, the six of them plan a day where all of them can go together. By the time they exit the store, at least three news vans are gathered around. Several reporters ask them for statements as they load their groceries into the back of Sapnap's van, and the six of them pile in and drive off without saying a word.

It's all over the news that night. They're at Sapnap and Karl's house for dinner, and all of their cell phones start ringing at the same time.

They ignore the calls. At least, until Phil calls, yells at them for a good few minutes, and then tells them not to do it again.

They do it again.

And again, and again, and again. They're very public about their friendship, about how close they are with each other, leaving not a doubt in the public's mind that they are united in this cause.

As a further distraction, they go back to watching video logs. They gather in Dream and George's house every night, and George goes upstairs while they watch and records more video logs. They've got a PC set up in one of the spare bedrooms, and George logs into his NASA account from there and talks for ten minutes while the crew watches a video log or two. Or five. Some of them are shorter than others.

They're in fairly boring territory, George knows- he's lost contact with NASA by now and is

spending most of his days doing rover modifications, but he knows there are a few gems in there where he records for three hours straight and just tells stories to keep himself entertained. On those nights, Karl comes over and he and George just mess around on Minecraft for a few hours, listening to the laughter from the crew downstairs.

This goes on for the next two months- they set a date for the trial fairly early on, and waiting for it to approach is pure hell. The only bright spot is when Dream's mother and George's parents come down at the same time, the day after the interviews, bringing both Patches and Cat with them. The two cats get along great, thankfully. George feels like everything's coming together, and then he remembers. They're not done yet.

The crew makes it through, however, to the point where *NASA v. Technoblade* is set to take place the next day.

George can practically feel the tension boiling in the house as he and Dream pace back and forth in the kitchen. The news is on in the background, showing a picture of him and Dream grocery shopping last week. The reporter is talking about the trial, obviously, it's the only thing anyone's been able to talk about for the last week.

George is just glad that the MIC has officially cleared Quackity- JPL isn't being held liable for his time on Mars. He thinks it's ridiculous that Techno still is, but as Techno confessed, he wasn't exactly nice to the man interviewing him.

"I got mean," he had admitted. The whole crew understood- they all know that Techno doesn't apologize, especially for things that aren't his fault. And George thinks he's finally starting to get it through Techno's head that it wasn't his fault.

The news continues blaring in the background, now showing a picture of Technoblade- his official NASA picture. George sighs and goes to turn the TV off.

"I was watching that," Dream protests. George hits the button on the remote, and Dream pouts at him.

"No you weren't," he replies. He flops down on the couch; he's exhausted. He's increased his therapy, so he's been meeting with Alyssa every other day as opposed to just twice a week. The oxygen therapy has been helping him physically, but his mental health still feels like shit.

He keeps double-checking things around the house, waiting for things to go wrong. He's paranoid about every aspect of his life, he still can't be alone for more than fifteen minutes at a time (though he's improved from ten minutes to fifteen), and he's *still* getting lost in his head too often.

Thank God for Dream, who puts his hands on George's arms and rubs them slowly.

"Hey," he says. "Talk to me. Where are you going?"

"I'm tired," George shrugs. "I think I might sleep on the couch. I don't want to walk up the stairs."

Dream frowns at him. He shrugs again.

"You're not supposed to be doing that," Dream says eventually, sighing. "Skeppy said--"

"I know what Skeppy said," George interrupts, rolling his eyes. Dream's frown deepens, and George immediately feels guilty. "I'm sorry. I'm just tired."

"I'll carry you up," Dream offers tentatively. George cracks a smile.

"Yeah?" he challenges, and the next thing he knows, Dream is scooping him up bridal-style and carrying him up the stairs. He laughs, letting his arms wrap around Dream's neck, and his head falls against Dream's chest. It feels domestic. It feels right.

"Thanks," he says as Dream sets him down on the bed with a grin.

"No problem," he responds, jumping onto the other side and nearly throwing George into the air. George rolls over and curls into him, and Dream's arms wrap around him naturally. One of the cats meows from somewhere in the house, and George snuggles deeper into Dream's embrace.

"George," Dream wheezes. "I've gotta get up. We have to get ready for bed."

"No," George protests. "Stay."

“Alright,” Dream says, and George doesn’t look up, but he knows Dream has that dopey smile on his face. “I’ll stay.”

He doesn’t remember falling asleep, but he wakes up to an iPhone alarm blaring. He groans, rubbing at his eyes and peeling himself away from Dream.

“Fuck,” Dream mutters. “We’ve gotta go, babe- the trial starts in forty minutes-”

George does not have time to think about Dream calling him ‘babe,’ he just throws on his nicest clothes and stumbles down the stairs, toothbrush hanging out of his mouth. Dream follows close behind him, trying to get a tie around his neck, and they both rush out to the car without shoes on.

The trial is being held in Houston, so it’s not a far drive. They’re able to make it on time and are mostly presentable, cameras on them the second they get out of the car. Sapnap and Karl are both waiting in the parking spot next to them, grinning.

“You’re wearing *that* into the trial?” George snorts to Sapnap- he’s got a bandana tied loosely around his head, holding back his hair.

“Hell yeah,” Sapnap says, wrapping an arm around George’s shoulders. “Why not?”

Niki and Puffy rush up to them only a few seconds later, and Technoblade follows, his shoulders rolled back and stance confident. The seven of them gathered turn to look at the courthouse- there are already plenty of people streaming inside for what’s being referred to as the trial of the century.

“Shall we?” Techno asks, and he’s the one that leads them up the stairs and into the courthouse. The rest of the crew follows in his wake, like a pyramid, spread out and taking up space. This is their day; they are going to be triumphant. Dream and George walk on either side of Technoblade. Niki and Puffy are clutching each other’s hands slightly behind Dream, and Sapnap and Karl are doing the same behind George.

The cameras are loud and their flashes are bright, and George ignores them all, keeps his gaze locked straight ahead. Reporters shove microphones in their faces, and they keep walking, faces set, expressionless. They make their way inside and the crowd practically parts for them, people jumping aside to let them through. They don’t stop until they’ve made it to their seats. Everyone else gathered in the courthouse murmurs as they sit down, George in between Dream and Sapnap,

taking up the whole front row. Technoblade sits down next to his lawyer, then turns back and grins at Tommy and Tubbo, sitting in the row behind the crew. Phil, Wilbur, Bad, and Quackity all join them shortly.

They're ready for this, George thinks. They've been ready for this. Now, it's time.

"Who should we pray to?" Dream says, leaning down to murmur in his ear.

"Praxidike," George responds. "Goddess of enacting justice."

He smirks, and Dream grins back. They're going to be enacting justice today. He glances over to the jury, most of whom are muttering to each other. He's sure the lawyers had a difficult time finding people who hadn't heard of their case, and based on the way a few people are looking at him, it's possible some of them have.

The trial starts shortly after everyone's arrival. George barely listens to the opening statements from each side, but he's sure the gathered crowd (the courtroom is completely packed, the gallery stuffed full) is a bit surprised to see the heads of NASA sitting on Technoblade's side, ready to support him.

The witnesses start being called forward. It's a civil case, not criminal, which George keeps reminding himself. It's going to be okay. They're going to be okay.

Technoblade is the first called to the stand. The questioner is someone from the MIC, a man called Chris Beck, but Phil's told them he's one of the kindest of the bunch. He'll treat them fairly- or so they hope.

"Commander," he begins, and Techno shifts. "Could you please tell us what Sol 6 looked like for you?"

"It was a regular day," Techno says. "We were getting work done, going about the mission as normal. Davidson and Sapnap were working near the Hab, Bloque and I had been working farther away. Puffy and Nihachu were in the Hab, and they alerted us that there was a storm warning. We all returned to the Hab and waited to hear from NASA, and they confirmed the mission was being cut short and we were to return to *Hermes* immediately. I instructed the crew to suit up."

“Did everyone suit up properly?” Beck asks.

“Yes,” Techno confirms. “Puffy checked everyone, I double-checked everyone. We were all a bit frantic, but we had been trained for this. We opened the airlock, and the storm was evident. Visibility was near-zero. I was relying solely on homing telemetry between my suit and the MAV.”

“And the MAV was your only way off Mars?”

“Yes. If it tipped, then all of us were trapped.”

“How did you proceed?”

“Major Sapnap led the group, as pilot I wanted him to get to the ship first. He was followed by Nihachu, Puffy, Bloque, Davidson, and then myself. As Commander, I was to be the last to get on the ship.”

“Is that because you put your crew before yourself?”

“Yes. It’s what I was trained to do, and it’s because I wanted to make sure they were all safe before I was.”

“Thank you. What happened then?”

“We were making progress toward the MAV. I couldn’t see anything, but all of a sudden Puffy was screaming, there was the sound of metal hitting something over our comms, and the next thing I knew Davidson’s hand was being ripped from mine.”

Techno pauses, holding steady eye contact with George. “I asked for Davidson to report multiple times and received nothing. I asked Nihachu for vitals, and she reported that she wasn’t getting any sort of read. Bloque and I both went back to attempt to search for him, but when we found nothing, Puffy dragged Bloque back onto the ship. I was fully prepared to stay and continue searching alone, but we needed to get to the ship in time.”

“In time?”

“If the MAV tipped too far, we wouldn’t be able to take off, and we would have been trapped and unable to evacuate.”

“So you had the whole crew’s life in your hands.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Continue, please.”

“We knew the mission was scrapped, the Hab wasn’t meant to withstand the storm, as confirmed by NASA. I have no idea how it did- JPL did their job better than anticipated, I guess.”

There are scattered laughs from around the courtroom. George hears Quackity scoff.

“When we were all aboard the ship,” Techno continues, “Nihachu confirmed that George’s bio-monitor was reporting pulse zero, blood pressure zero, temperature normal. All signs of death.”

“Temperature normal?”

“It- uh. It can take a while for a body to cool down after death.”

“I understand. Can a bio-monitor report loss of life?”

“Not definitively. It only relays vitals.”

“And without proper vitals- blood pressure zero, pulse zero- one could safely assume an instance of death.”

“I...” Techno says, looking around between the crew, before steeling himself and letting his gaze fall on Beck. “Yeah. Yes. One could safely assume an instance of death.”

“Which you did.”

“I did. I was fully prepared to go back down and continue to search, but the MAV had nearly tipped too far. Another few seconds and we wouldn’t have made it. I ordered Sapnap to launch. We went through all proper protocol to return to *Hermes* and spent the next few months in mourning.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Nothing to be done about it,” Techno huffs. Beck paces back and forth a few times.

“What happened when you found out Doctor Davidson was alive?”

“The whole crew was shocked. NASA- er. NASA hadn’t told us, they didn’t want it to interfere with us returning home. Once they had a stable means of communication, they alerted us. I remember a lot of cursing from Sapnap, shock from the rest of the crew.”

“And yourself?”

“I blamed myself. I still do blame myself. I told the crew they were just following orders when they tried to comfort me, and they weren’t having it. George has told me multiple times, over email, in person, on *Hermes* , on Earth, that it wasn’t my fault. I still don’t believe him.”

“I see,” Beck says. He’s silent for a few moments, formulating his next thoughts. “Is that what made you decide to go back? You blamed yourself?”

“The entire crew decided to go back, unanimously,” Techno corrects him. “And even if I didn’t believe it had been my fault, I would have gone back. If it had been any one of them, I would have gone back.”

“I see,” Beck repeats. “Thank you for your time, Commander Technoblade.”

Techno nods and steps down from the stand. Sapnap leans forward to pat him on the shoulder as he

sits, and the whole courtroom waits with bated breath to see who's called next.

"If Major Nick Sapnap could take the stand, please."

Sapnap nods and makes his way forward, settling himself down carefully. Beck begins without hesitation.

"Major Sapnap, in the case that anything happened to Commander Technoblade, you were set to take over as interim commander, correct?"

"Correct," Sapnap confirms.

"Did you have additional duties as second-in-command?"

"It wasn't really a position like that," Sapnap shrugs. "We all had jobs. We were assigned positions. We deferred to Commander Technoblade. If something happened to the Commander that made him incapable of completing his responsibilities as Commander, I would step up and take his place. We would all still do our jobs. We would continue our assigned positions."

"I understand. Major Sapnap, Commander Technoblade already discussed that you were the first aboard the MAV. Can you give us some insight as to what was happening in your head at the time that the Commander, Bloque, and Captain Puffy were still not on board? Both as the pilot and, potentially, as an expectant interim commander?"

"I wasn't thinking about that," Sapnap laughs. "The interim commander part. I was thinking about how I needed to get my crew on board or else we would all be stuck there. I was thinking about how my best friend had just gone missing. I was thinking about how three more of my best friends were going to go missing if they didn't get on the MAV. I understood the desperation to find him—we were all desperate to find him."

"I see—"

"No, I'm sorry, I don't think you do," Sapnap says, and George can already see that he's about to go off, and he clutches Dream's hand in anticipation. "What needs to be understood is that the Ares III crew has always been more like family. Sol 6 I felt a lot of things. I felt devastation at our mission being cut short after only six sols on the surface, after all our preparation. I felt fear at the

realization that we might not make it off on time, that all of us might be trapped there and die in that storm. I felt anticipation at the idea that even though the mission was cut short, I would be on my way home shortly to see my husband. But more than that I felt agony at the loss of Doctor Davidson. He was my best friend. Is my best friend. And in that moment, when the rest of them still weren't on board, all I could think was, 'I can't lose the rest of them.'"

"Major Sapnap-"

"I know. That's not the answer to the question you asked. But the jury still needs to know. None of us wanted to leave without Doctor Davidson. And for what it's worth, it was a unanimous decision to return back to Mars to rescue him. And, again. For what it's worth. I think every last one of us wouldn't hesitate to do it again."

"Major Sapnap," Beck huffs.

"I know," Sapnap repeats. "I'm done now."

"So Commander Technoblade ordered you to launch," Beck says, clearly trying to move on. George is gripping Dream's hand as tightly as he can. Sapnap is looking at him, and he cracks half a grin. George does his best to smile back.

"Yes, he did," Sapnap says. "He nodded at first, I told him I needed verbal confirmation, he gave it to me. It killed me to launch without George. It really did."

"And were you surprised when you found out Doctor Davidson was alive? Commander Technoblade said-"

"Commander Technoblade was right," Sapnap chuckles. "I swore. A lot. None of it's appropriate language for a courtroom. I was stunned beyond belief. And I knew that I would do anything within my power to bring him home."

"Thank you, Major Sapnap. That'll be all."

When Sapnap takes his seat, he grabs George's free hand and grips it tightly. Niki is the next called to the stand. She walks up primly, sitting down carefully, and George can see from Beck's stance that he isn't going to be forgiving.

“Doctor Nihachu, can you tell us about your history working with medicine?” Beck asks. Niki gives a little huff. She then goes on a spiel that lasts three minutes (George counts it in his head), and by the time she’s done, Beck looks like he regrets asking.

“Thank you,” he says weakly. “Er- as flight surgeon and team medic, you received all bio-monitor alerts, yes?”

“Yes,” Niki confirms. “It was my job to monitor the health of the crew.”

“Based on the results of Doctor Davidson’s bio-monitor at the time of the evacuation, and based off of your expertise in the medical field, would you say it was a safe bet to assume Davidson had been killed on impact?”

“On impact, I couldn’t say,” Niki says. “But after, certainly. He shouldn’t have survived decompression as long as he did. Based on what he’s told me, the only reason he survived long enough to make it back to the Hab was because blood from his wounds congealed around the hole in his suit and sealed it enough that oxygen was leaking out at a very slow rate. But based on his blood pressure and pulse, yes. It was a safe bet to assume he was dead.”

“Did you influence Commander Technoblade’s decision to leave Mars?”

“I didn’t want to say that he was dead,” Niki says. “None of us did. But I told him what the bio-monitor was reporting.”

“And you weren’t on the ground when you received the alert? You were on the ship?”

“Correct. Puffy had shoved me up the ladder, she didn’t give me much of a choice.” She smiles endearingly, and George remembers why she’s their press person.

“Did you want to go back down and continue the search?”

“Of course I did,” Niki says. “Sapnap did, too. We were prepared to, but Techno ordered us to stay, and we listened to our Commander.”

“One last question, Doctor Nihachu. Did you, as the flight surgeon and medic, as a trained doctor, believe that Doctor Davidson was dead?”

Niki takes a deep breath, makes eye contact with George. George nods. He won't be hurt.

“Yes,” she says, and her voice speaks nothing but honesty. “I truly did.”

“Thank you, Doctor Nihachu.”

Niki nods and makes her way down. Puffy is called up next, asked similar questions to the first three. George is mostly zoning out, thinking about what he might be asked, what he's going to have to say, what he's going to have to relive.

He's not called up next- Dream is. Dream squeezes his hand one last time before he gets up to take the stand, and he's asked pretty much the same questions as Puffy. He maintains easy eye contact with Beck the whole time, and God, George thinks, he's beautiful. And George is so, so very in love, he wants to get up and shout it to the whole courtroom, but there's a time and a place for that.

Too soon, it seems, Dream is returning to his place, and George's name is being called. He makes his way forward and takes a seat carefully. It's odd, seeing the courtroom from this view, and Beck smiles at him as he sits.

“Hello, Doctor Davidson,” he says, and George swallows harshly before greeting him. There are a few preemptive questions, and then Beck says, “If you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your eighteen months alone on Mars.”

“Do I get a choice?” George asks, and the courtroom laughs. Beck smiles at him.

“I won't push too hard,” he says reassuringly.

“Hit me,” George shrugs.

“Can you describe for the jury what it was like on Sol 6?”

“Sure thing,” George says, taking a deep breath. “I’d been outside working with Sapnap. We were snarking at each other, like we normally do. Puffy alerted us to new messages from NASA, telling us to abandon the mission, basically. We all reviewed it together, and the Commander ordered us to suit up. So we did, Puffy double-checked us, Techno double-checked us, we made our way out.”

“Was the order in which you walked predetermined?”

“Yes. In case of emergency, Sapnap was to get to the MAV first, followed by Niki. Puffy, Dream, and I walked in a bit of a mass group, and Techno took the back.”

“What happened then?”

“Visibility was near zero- Dream was right in front of me, and I could barely see him.”

“And Dream is... Doctor Bloque?”

“Yeah, sorry. I felt him go down, I thought he was trying to drag me down, too, but I stayed up. And I got hit in the chest, went flying back through the air, and blacked out before I hit the ground.”

“What happened when you woke up?”

“Uh. There was a lot of beeping. I remember thinking it was annoying, and that the sun was bright and it was annoying, and that my stomach really hurt and that was annoying. Then I realized it was my oxygen alarm. Niki was right, the only reason I hadn’t immediately died was because blood and dirt had surrounded the breach. I managed to get the antennae piercing my stomach unattached from the communications satellite it was on, stumbled my way back to the Hab, and performed emergency surgery on myself, basically.”

“You performed surgery on yourself?” Beck asks, sounding surprised. George scoffs. That was nothing.

“Yeah, I dug the antennae and all the other little pieces of metal out of my stomach, opened up the cut a lot more in the process, and then stitched myself up. I’d landed on my back, so I hadn’t lost too much blood, thankfully, but it hurt like a bitch.”

Beck nods, letting that sink in before he continues. “Had the antennae pierced anything other than you and your suit?”

“Oh, yeah,” George says. “My bio-monitor was completely obliterated. It would’ve reported back my last known stats to Niki, which were. Y’know. None, considering it was smashed. They had perfect reason to assume I was dead.”

“I see. How soon did you realize you were alone?”

“Right away, when I saw the MAV was gone, I knew at least some of us had made it off. When I was in the Hab I realized it was just me.”

“And how did that make you feel?”

George laughs harshly. “What kind of a question is that?” he asks. Beck gives him a look. He takes a breath. “I was terrified. I was scared and alone. And most of all I was happy that the rest of the crew had gotten off that damn planet.”

Beck nods. “Could you describe those first few days for the jury?”

It goes on like that for much too long- George is asked to describe practically every aspect of his time on Mars. Finally, after nearly an hour, he thinks Beck might be coming to a close.

“Doctor Davidson, from what you’ve described, it sounds like you’ve survived impossible scenarios. Was there ever a time that you felt like you were certain you were dead?”

“Every damn day,” George says.

“But you didn’t give up.”

“No. I had too much to fight for.” He makes eye contact with Dream, and Dream is barely containing a smile. The rest of the crew is watching him, and they look immensely proud.

“Thank you, Doctor Davidson. One last question. Do you believe Commander Technoblade abandoned the search for you too soon?”

“No,” George says instantly. “I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again. No. Commander Technoblade did what was best for the crew, and I’m glad he did. Because now all six of us are alive, and even if I hadn’t made it, five of us would have. It was an incredibly difficult decision he had to make, and I’m glad he came to the conclusion he did.”

“Thank you, Doctor. That’ll be all.”

George nods and takes his seat. His movements are unsteady at first, but he keeps his gaze focused on Dream, and he walks steady. He slides back down into his own seat and lets Dream grip his hand again, where the cameras can’t see, where the MIC can’t see, where no one can see.

The rest of the trial passes in a blur of movement and talking and people being called up to the stand. The jury takes exactly fourteen minutes to come back with their conclusion, and one of the members reads it out-

“Commander Technoblade is not guilty on any and all charges. We find that no one is responsible for Doctor George Davidson’s eighteen months on Mars other than the planet itself.”

And it feels like the whole courtroom cheers. The whole crew lunges forward to pull Technoblade into a group hug, and they rest there for a long time, ignoring the clicking of the cameras and the other people surrounding them.

They’ve done it. They’re really, truly safe, and home, and it’s so, so spectacular.

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

[spotify playlist](#)

[quote bot](#)

comments/kudos/subs/etc are always appreciated! :D

Hera

Chapter Notes

this was gonna be all fluff but eve wanted more angst so have some more angst lmao
sorry

fanart!!!

[george](#)

[george again](#)

y'all are so talented wtf

your comments fuel me- thank you to every single one of you, you guys rock. i love
y'all!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The trial is over.

They have no celebratory dinner that night; they all go home, to their own houses, and they rest. Commander Technoblade allows himself to relax for the first time since he left Earth more than three years ago. Major Sapnap stays up late with his husband, the TV on in the background as the two of them lay together and just soak in each other's presence. Captain Puffy and Doctor Nihachu start baking a cake, because they're going to celebrate, whether it happens that night or not; they end with flour and sugar coating the kitchen and themselves. Director Phil Watson goes to bed with his wife; Directors Fundy, Soot, Bad, and Quackity go out for drinks at a quiet bar where no one recognizes them; scientists Ranboo, Tommy, and Tubbo throw a mini party in their apartment.

And Doctor Bloque slips into the room where the love of his life is recording a video log, and he leans against the doorway as Doctor Davidson grins into a camera and says he can't believe it, it's finally over, they're finally home and safe, and-

And he is not safe. He still has issues, physically and mentally, but he's getting better. He's getting better, and he says it with such determination that Dream nearly cries, and when George is done recording he turns and sees Dream standing in the doorway and he thinks *the most remarkable thing about you standing in the doorway is that it's you, and that you're standing in the doorway,*

and then he laughs and stands up and buries himself in Dream's arms. They stand there for a long time, and eventually, they go to bed.

They have no celebratory dinner the night of the trial; they save it for the next weekend. The next weekend, when Dream and George offer to host and the entire families of everyone in the crew and then a few more people are invited to come and join them as they celebrate the fact that Technoblade is not guilty on all counts, that George is alive and home, that they've all made it this far and they're going to keep making it.

The house is full of people; everyone George wants to see is here, his parents are here, the cats are running around under the feet of his best friends, his *family*, and his family's family, and everything is perfect.

And at one point, Sapnap stands up on their table, and as Dream yells at him to get down Karl laughs, loud and high, and Sapnap's got a glass of champagne in one hand and he calls for silence and he receives it. George is standing near him, and he has no idea what his best friend is about to say, but he's going to listen no matter what it is.

"Attention, friends and family!" Sapnap calls, even though he already has their attention. He's probably a little tipsy, but he winks down at George when their eyes meet. "As you may know, I love my husband very much. Enough to marry him again! We didn't have a proper ceremony last time, so we're going to have one this time, and you're all invited!"

The room applauds, and George grins and meets Dream's eyes and laughs when Dream just shakes his head in amusement and amazement. Sapnap gets off their table and presses his lips firmly against Karl's and someone yells for them to get a room, and just like that, the party continues.

When it's over, when everyone has gone home very early in the morning, with George's parents set up in one of their guest rooms and Dream's parents in the other and Drista on the couch, George lets himself rest his forehead against Dream's shoulder as they stand in their mess of a kitchen. Dream's hands reach up to rub George's shoulders, and he takes deep breaths. He always takes deep breaths. He doesn't think that's a habit he'll be breaking anytime soon.

"Hey," Dream says quietly, and his hands come to a stop on George's upper arms, then wrap around his waist. "You all good?"

"Tired," George murmurs, letting himself sink further against Dream. "Bed?"

“What, you want me to carry you?” Dream snorts, and George laughs. “This isn’t gonna become a habit, George-”

“Yes it is,” George says, wrapping his arms around Dream’s neck and attempting to pull himself up. He jumps, swings his legs, and Dream catches him and stares at him with something akin to wonder in his eyes. “What?” George asks, glancing around.

“You were strong enough to do that,” Dream says, and he breaks out into a grin, and it’s so contagious that George can’t help but smile too. “You’re getting better, George, and I’m so fucking proud of you.”

George nearly bursts into tears then and there, but he’s cried enough. Instead he rests his head against Dream’s shoulder and grins up at him, and he’s about to say something when they’re interrupted by a loud cough from the living room.

“You guys have a bedroom, you know,” Drista’s voice says, and they turn to see her poking her head up from the couch and glaring at them. “Why don’t you use it?”

“Sorry, Drista,” Dream chuckles, and he turns to carry George up the stairs.

“Get together already, Jesus,” George hears Drista mutter as they go, and his face flushes red. When he looks up at Dream, he sees that he’s red in the face, too.

They don’t talk about it as they get ready for bed, and when they do slip under the blankets they assume their normal positions- George curls into Dream’s arms, and Dream holds him protectively, and George doesn’t think anything is ever going to top the way Dream holds him. Not like he’s fragile, going to break, but like he’s the strongest thing in the world and Dream wants him all to himself.

He’s in love. He’s so, so in love, with everything aspect of Dream, with everything Dream does and says and all the things he doesn’t do and doesn’t say. He’s so in love, and it’s overwhelming how in love he is.

And it hits him all at once, as he lays in bed, and his breath hitches. Dream opens his eyes, concern immediately present, and George tries to take a deep breath in but it hitches again, and then again, and he pulls himself out of Dream’s grip and sits up and his breath keeps catches and he can’t get enough oxygen in and his lungs are burning and-

And there's a hand on his back and another one running through his hair, and he focuses on that sensation, grounds himself the way Alyssa taught him too, because he's getting *better*, damnit, he's not going to have a panic attack over the idea of being in love, but some part of him is telling him to let it out, to let it run its course, and he says *no*.

He takes a deep breath in, and then lets it out, and Dream's voice in his head and in his ears tells him to keep breathing, and he keeps breathing. He keeps breathing, and his breath doesn't catch, and he focuses on Dream's hands, on his back and in his hair, and slowly, the world comes back into focus, and he's still so in love that it's overwhelming, but it's not going to hurt him.

"Hey," Dream says quietly, when he sees that George is back. "What happened, baby?"

"I don't know," George lies, and he knows Dream can tell when he lies just like he can tell when Dream lies, but Dream doesn't question it.

"Are you feeling okay now?" he asks.

George thinks about it for a moment- his lungs are still burning, and he thinks they're going to be doing that for a while. But it's not as horrible as it was a few months ago- he's okay, he tells himself, and he's telling the truth.

"Yeah," he answers. "I'm feeling okay now."

Dream smiles at him and lays back down, arms open; an offering. George takes it eagerly, snuggling against Dream's side, and he pretends not to notice when Dream presses his lips against the top of George's head and holds him not like he's glass, but like he's diamond, unbreakable, unstoppable, unkillable.

He wakes up in Dream's arms, and everything feels right in the world.

Sapnap and Karl plan the fastest wedding in history, George thinks. In the span of one month-thirty days- they send out invitations, rent out a park, choose their bridal parties, the whole deal. It's crazy, George thinks, and the worst part is that they rope him and Dream into helping.

"Listen," Sapnap says. "We still have two months of paid leave left. You guys don't have anything to do other than driving George to his oxygen therapy once a day for a few hours."

"That's not true!" George protests. "We also drive me to my actual therapy."

"Whatever," Sapnap replies, rolling his eyes. "The point is, you guys have nothing to do. So you might as well help us."

"As the best man for each of us, you kind of have to," Karl agrees, and Dream mutters a few choice curse words, because once both Sapnap *and* Karl are giving them the puppy-dog eyes, it's extremely difficult to say no.

"Fine," George says. "We'll help you."

He suggests getting the rest of the crew on board, but Niki and Puffy smile and say they're taking a European tour. Three weeks, traveling the continent, visiting some of Niki's family, the works. George is thrilled for them- he still hasn't been cleared to fly on a plane, but he's happy they have been, and that they have something to do that isn't folding RSVP cards into invitations and carefully labeling envelopes with addresses.

They text Technoblade at one point, but he just laughs.

"I'm rereading the Art of War," he tells them.

"For the entire month?" Sapnap asks. He nominated George to come with him, so George stands in the background and shakes his head.

"Yes," Technoblade says. "I'm a slow reader."

"Bullshit," Sapnap replies. "Come fold envelopes with us."

“I’m studying to become a master of several dozen wartime strategies,” Techno says blankly, and George coughs to cover up a laugh. “I’m an extremely busy man, Sapnap.”

“Fine,” Sapnap says. “But you have to come to the bachelor parties, the rehearsal dinner, and the wedding itself.”

“What?” Techno says, a look of fake surprise on his face. “Why would I have to do that?” He makes eye contact with George and widens his eyes in a mock *help me* expression, and George doesn’t cough to cover up that laugh.

“You’re a groomsman, Techno, whether you like it or not,” Sapnap shrugs. “We’ll see you in a few weeks, I guess, have fun with your martial arts or whatever!”

They don’t see him in a few weeks- they see him a few days later, when Niki and Puffy FaceTime them from somewhere in Spain and demand to speak to all of them. Techno arrives twelve minutes later and ends up staying four hours as they hook the FaceTime up to the television and all shout over each other. Techno ends up helping George with putting together the RSVP cards. It’s horribly domestic. George loves it.

They continue this trend, like they normally do; Niki and Puffy FaceTime every few days, Techno gets roped into helping with decorations, they all spend time together. Dream drives George to his therapy, and he breathes easier and easier, both literally and metaphorically. He stops triple-checking all the systems in the house before he goes to bed, and progresses down to just double-checking. Dream buys a bottle of wine to celebrate, and George drinks half of it and nearly confesses his love then and there, but chooses to pass out on Dream’s shoulder instead.

The day of the wedding comes upon them quickly; George almost isn’t ready for it, and he can’t imagine what Sapnap and Karl are feeling. Panic, maybe. Probably. Sapnap calls him at three in the morning four days before the wedding and asks if he’s doing the right thing.

“Sapnap,” George says seriously, his voice rough from sleep. Dream is stirring next to him, and he really doesn’t want to wake Dream up. That’s why Sapnap called him and not Dream, after all; they all know better than to wake Dream up. “Sapnap, you’re already married to him. This is just a big party.”

“Oh, yeah,” Sapnap says. “Right. Thanks, George. Love you.”

And then he hangs up. George goes back to sleep.

The “bachelor parties” happen simultaneously- they’re not so much as bachelor parties as an excuse for their friends to go out and get drunk. Techno and Dream act as their designated drivers, and George is cleared by Skeppy to have one (1) glass of whatever he wants to drink. He chooses carefully as Sapnap and Karl get absolutely shitfaced with everyone they’ve brought along. The next day, George wakes up, hears noise, untangles himself from Dream, and walks downstairs with a baseball bat in hand to find Sapnap rooting through their kitchen, looking for painkillers.

“Hangover,” Sapnap says wisely.

“How did you get into my house?” George asks in response.

The rehearsal goes smoothly, and as George stands at Karl’s side as his best man, he thinks that everything is perfect. There’s no way things could get better than this.

And then he looks at Dream, standing next to Sapnap, and thinks that there’s one way things could get better than this. He allows himself to picture him doing this with Dream, for just a moment, and then he shakes it out of his head.

The wedding is the next day, and Sapnap sleeps in their guest room, claiming he can’t see Karl before the wedding. Dream argues that they’re literally already married, but once Sapnap is inside their house, they can’t get him out. George calls him a feral raccoon. Sapnap accepts the title with pride.

In the morning, George leaves to help Karl get ready, joined by Niki and a few of Karl’s other friends. Then George practically sprints out of the house to get into Dream’s car in time to make sure everything at the park is completely set up. He hugs Sapnap when he arrives, and Sapnap is practically bouncing on his toes with anxiety.

“Remember, you’re already married,” George says, because apparently Sapnap really needs the reminder. He just nods and checks his breath, and George rolls his eyes.

The ceremony is beautiful- George and Dream walk down the aisle next to each other and they’re laughing the whole time, Sapnap close behind them. Sapnap nearly cries when he sees Karl, and there’s hardly a dry eye in the audience when they exchange their handwritten vows. Sapnap

mentions Hera, the goddess of marriage, and he makes brief eye contact with George as he does so.

There's a reception afterwards at a large banquet hall, and Dream and George once again sprint from the ceremony to make sure everything is set up correctly. Then they prepare to party well into the night. George cheers as Sapnap and Karl have their first dance, and then Dream drags him onto the dancefloor, where he stays for a while.

Eventually, his lungs start burning, and he takes that as his cue to sit down. He continues watching Dream, now slow-dancing with Sapnap and laughing, and a woman George thinks is Sapnap's mother sits down next to him.

"You and Dream are very cute," she says, and George blushes. "How long have you been together?"

"Oh—" George says. "Oh, we're not- we're- not together."

"Oh," Sapnap's mother says, looking genuinely surprised. "I just saw the way you looked at each other at the press conference, and now here—"

"It's alright," George says with a soft smile. "I think a lot of people think we're together. But we're not." His smile turns sad.

She smiles back at him and pats his shoulder. "It's okay to be in love with him, you know." His blush deepens, and she laughs.

"Am I that obvious?" he asks.

"Sapnap told me," she confesses. "But yes. You are."

"Good to know," he says with a nod, and Dream pauses his dancing to grin solely at him, and George's heart melts because he's so, so in love.

Karl finds a bouquet of flowers and claims he's going to toss it, and that the person who catches it is getting married next. Dream jokingly joins the crowd waiting, and George sits next to Sapnap

and laughs. One of Karl's relatives ends up catching it, and Dream pretends to be disappointed. And they keep dancing, and laughing, and at some point George finds himself back on the dance floor, held in Dream's arms as they sway back and forth.

"This feels like a middle school dance," Dream whispers, and George snorts.

"I didn't have those," he replies, and Dream scoffs and holds him tighter, and he doesn't let go.

At some point, George's lungs start burning again, so he makes his way outside to try and get some fresh air. He takes a few deep breaths until the burn starts to go away, like he usually does, but this time it doesn't. He sits down on the steps outside the door he exited through, and eventually, someone sits next to him.

"Hey," Sapnap says, shifting so that he's sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with George.

"Hey," George replies, trying to smile through the pain at him. "Shouldn't you be inside?"

"Needed some air," Sapnap shrugs. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," George lies, and his lungs are practically screaming in protest. Too much dancing, he thinks. Too much physical activity. Skeppy warned him against it, and he ignored it in favor of having fun in the moment, and he's regretting it now. He doesn't let it show, because he's sure it'll pass.

"I saw you talking with my mom," Sapnap says teasingly, and George feels his face go red. Sapnap chuckles. "What'd she have to say?"

"She thought Dream and I were together," George replies dryly. "I wonder why."

"Oh, I told her you guys were in love," Sapnap admits immediately, mischievous grin on his face. "But that you're both too stupid to do anything about it."

George frowns. "I can't fuck this up, Sapnap," he says, and Sapnap's grin fades to a sad smile. "We've got- we've got a good thing going. I can't fuck it up."

“I know you think that,” Sapnap says, putting a hand on his back. “But I don’t think anything you could do would fuck it up. Dream loves you, yeah? And you love him. Nothing’s going to change that, especially not a confession.”

“Maybe,” George hums, and Sapnap pats his back a few times before he stands up and holds out a hand. George takes it, ignoring his lungs’ protests for now, and makes his way back inside.

They don’t get home until nearly three in the morning, after dropping Karl and Sapnap off at their own house. They stumble up to bed and George reaches out before Dream can collapse on top of the covers.

“What?” he asks, taking George’s hand.

“Dance with me,” George insists.

“We’ve danced plenty,” Dream says. George just drags him forward and he laughs, putting his hands on George’s waist. George rests his head on Dream’s chest, wrapping his arms around Dream’s neck, and Dream tucks his chin on top of him. They sway together for a few moments, and George’s mind races.

He can’t fuck it up. He *won’t* fuck it up, not according to Sapnap. And he knows, deep down, that he’s not going to fuck anything up. But he’s still so fucking afraid, and it feels like there’s nothing he can do to stop that, not when every instant he’s filled with overwhelming love and fear and it still feels like if he makes one wrong move then he’ll die, sometimes.

He knows he’s come far. He’s not going to die now, not after everything. But if Dream doesn’t love him, then he just might, because he loves Dream with his whole heart, his whole body and mind and soul, and without Dream he has no idea what he’d do.

But like Sapnap said- Dream loves him, and he loves Dream. Nothing is going to change that. Being separated by hundreds of millions of miles of space didn’t change that. George breathes, and his lungs burn, a searing reminder of everything he’s been through, and he opens his mouth to say something because it’s now or never, if there’s anything he’s learned it’s that you never know what tomorrow might bring, it’s now or never-

And that’s when he collapses in Dream’s arms.

Dream catches him easily, sinking them both down to the ground, and George's vision blacks in and out for a few moments. There's blood pounding in his ears and he can't breathe, he can't breathe, every part of his body hurt and he's back on the ship right after they rescued him and he's back on Mars after he blew himself up and he's back, he's *back*, he escaped but he's back, he always goes back-

The warm presence at his side leaves, and he nearly lets out a sob, but he still can't breathe. And then it's back, and there's a mask around his mouth and nose and the noise of a machine being turned on and hands clutching his and he takes in a lungful of oxygen. His organs screech at him, but he keeps breathing, and he remembers the machine Skeppy gave them in case of emergencies. Once he's got his senses back, he recognizes Dream at his side, staring down at him in pure fear.

"Hi," George croaks out, and then he coughs a few times, trying to roll over onto his side.

"Hi," Dream says, and oh, he's crying, and George reaches out to try and hold his face. Dream's hand comes up to hold George's against his cheek, and George coughs again. "Are you okay?"

"No," George says, and it feels like the first time he's ever admitted it, that he's not okay, he doesn't need to push through, he has someone here to take *care* of him- "I can't- Dream, I couldn't breathe-"

"I know, baby," Dream says, moving his hand to smooth back George's hair. "But you can breathe now, yeah?"

"Yeah," George confirms, sucking in another breath. "Something- something's wrong, Dream, I can't- my lungs-"

"We'll go to the hospital," Dream says, scrambling for his phone. "We'll- I'll call Skeppy, he'll meet us there, it'll be fine-"

"Yeah," George says again, letting his head fall back and his eyes drift closed. There's a phone ringing and then he can hear someone else's voice, but his eyelids are fluttering and he can barely come up with a coherent thought. "Yeah."

"George, stay awake for me, okay?" Dream says, suddenly sounding panicked. George wonders why. Everything is fine, isn't it? Everything's okay. He's alive, and they're back on Earth, and

their best friends are married. Everything is perfectly fine. “George. George!”

He thinks he should try to stay awake, but he’s *tired*, and it’s been a long day, and with Dream’s voice in his ears and air being supplied to him, he lets himself fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

[spotify playlist](#)

[quote bot](#)

comments/kudos/subs/etc are always appreciated!

Panacea

Chapter Notes

sorry about the cliffhanger last chapter whoops

also!!! teal my beloved made a quote bot w/ quotes from my fics, which you should totally check out because i want it to get a lot of clout sjdhfjks it's called [andthetheybot](#) which i think is absolutely clever and lovely okay that's all have a good day enjoy the chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

One moment things are perfectly fine. They're slow dancing in their bedroom, just swaying back and forth, really, the steady beat of their hearts reminding them they're alive. Dream knows that George is lost in thought, but he doesn't say anything about it. It's been a long day.

The next moment, George is collapsing, going completely limp. Dream's got his arms around George's waist, so he's able to catch him quickly, lowering him down to the ground as gently as he can. George's breathing is ragged, coming in harsh gasps, and amidst the sudden panic Dream lunges for the breathing machine they keep by George's side of the bed. It's all hooked up and ready to go, in case of an emergency, and based on how much George is struggling this is definitely an emergency.

"Stay with me, George, hang on," Dream mutters as he wraps the strap of the mask around George's head. He turns the machine on, and George takes in a huge, shuddering breath. Then he takes another, and another, and Dream lets out a sigh of not quite relief, but something close to it. He allows himself a moment to revel in the pure fear that's still flashing through his body as he stares down at George, waits for him to be alright, because he *has* to be alright-

"Hi," George says, and his voice sounds completely shot, and Dream's heart shatters. He coughs a few times, then pushes himself over, trying to roll onto his side. Dream helps him, holds him as it sounds like he tries to hack up a lung, and then bends down as he rolls back onto his back.

"Hi," Dream replies, and oh, he hadn't even noticed that he's crying, but there are hot tears in his eyes. George reaches one hand up to try and hold his face, and Dream catches it and presses it to his cheek. George coughs again, and despite already knowing the answer, Dream asks, "Are you okay?"

“No,” George says, and Dream can see the effort it takes him to say it, to choke out the words. “I can’t- Dream, I couldn’t breathe-”

“I know, baby,” Dream says, moving his hand to smooth back George’s hair. He doesn’t think George should be talking too much, he should be- he should be saving his breath, but God, he’s not prepared for this situation, he doesn’t know what to do. “But you can breathe now, yeah?”

“Yeah,” George confirms, sucking in another breath as if to prove it. “Something- something’s wrong, Dream, I can’t- my lungs-”

“We’ll go to the hospital,” Dream says, and he lunges for his phone on the bedside table. “We’ll- I’ll call Skeppy, he’ll meet us there, it’ll be fine-” He searches through his contacts for Skeppy’s number and hits the button quickly the phone rings a few times, and Dream hurriedly goes back to George’s side.

“Yeah,” George is saying, and his head is back and his eyes are drifting closed.

“Dream?” Skeppy asks through the phone, sounding half asleep. “What-”

“Something happened, George just- he just collapsed, and he couldn’t breathe, I’ve got him on the oxygen machine now-”

“You need to breathe too, Dream, deep breaths,” Skeppy says, already sounding more awake. “Stay calm. I’ll be at the hospital in twenty minutes, I’ll let my team know you’re on your way, just keep him on the machine-”

“Okay,” Dream agrees, looking down at George. He looks completely out of it, and Dream grips his hand tightly.

“Yeah,” George says again, and Dream whispers a few choice curse words. He puts his hand on George’s neck, trying to feel for a pulse- it’s erratic and racing, but it’s slowing down.

“Keep him awake,” Skeppy advises. “I’m hanging up now, but it’ll be okay, it was probably overexertion from the wedding.”

“Okay,” Dream agrees, and there’s the sound of Skeppy hanging up the phone. He looks down at George- his eyes are closed, but he’s still breathing raggedly. “George, stay awake for me, okay?” he says, and he can feel the panic rising as George doesn’t respond. He knows better than to shake him, but he’s starting to get frantic. “George. George!”

No response. Dream curses again, shoves his phone into his pocket. He’s lucky they’re still dressed, suit coats tossed on the bed and dress shoes somewhere downstairs. They’ve already got the top few buttons of their dress shirts undone, so that’s not preventing George from breathing. Dream grabs a pair of shoes from one corner of the room and slides them on quickly, then loops the bag the machine is in over one shoulder and bends down to scoop George up.

Even though he’s no longer technically considered malnourished, he still feels far too light. It’s easy to get him down the stairs and out the door, and Dream is able to shift his weight to one arm to get the car door open. He tries to think of someone to call- he doesn’t want to bother Sapnap and he doubts his best friend would pick up anyways, Puffy and Niki had been in charge of clean-up at the reception hall, and-

He dials Technoblade’s number as he backs the car out of the garage. He’s already racing out of the neighborhood by the time the Commander picks up, gaze swiveling back and forth between George and the road. George is slumped over in his seat, head against the window, mask secured around his mouth and nose.

“Dream?” Techno asks blearily. “This better be an emergency, I was just about to sleep-”

“It’s an emergency,” Dream says immediately. “We’re on our way to the hospital, George just- he just collapsed, Techno, I’ve got him on the breathing machine but I don’t know what else to do-”

“Stay calm, Bloque, that’s an order,” Techno says in his Commander Voice, and Dream can feel himself relaxing as a reflex. “You’re doing fine, just get him to the hospital, I’ll meet you there. Did you call Skeppy?”

“Yeah, he’s on his way,” Dream confirms.

“Okay,” Techno says, and there’s the jangling of keys in the background. “Is George awake?”

“No, he was having trouble breathing and he passed out, but his- his breathing is steady, I just-”

“Calm, Dream,” Techno says again, and Dream takes a few shuddering breaths. “I’m gonna stay on the line, okay? Just get him to the hospital.”

Dream knows that tone of voice, that Techno is fighting to keep the worry at bay for the sake of his crew. Eventually there’s the sound of a car engine starting, and Dream pulls up to NASA headquarters quickly. He tells Techno they’ve arrived and Techno promises he’ll be there within ten minutes, and Dream hangs up the phone.

He goes to the other side of the car and once again picks George up bridal style, hooking the bag over one shoulder. Then he all-but sprints into the building. There are already people waiting, at least half a dozen doctors with a bed on wheels and an IV already set up. Dream sets George down carefully and keeps a tight grip on the bag, and one of the doctors tries to take it from him.

“We’ll handle it from here, sir,” she says, and Dream shakes his head quickly.

“No,” Dream insists. “No, I need to- I need to go with him, I need to be with him-”

“We need to run some tests, and it would be best for you to stay here,” the doctor says firmly, finally wrenching the bag from his grip. “Thank you for getting him here, but we’ll alert you when he’s okay to see visitors.”

“But-” Dream starts, and then the doors open again as Skeppy comes rushing in.

“Dream,” he says quickly. Dream’s got one hand on the railing of the bed, keeping the doctors from taking George away, because he can’t lose George, not when they’ve come this far, not when Dream hasn’t told him how he feels, not now, not ever-

“Skeppy,” Dream says. “Skeppy, I need to- I need to be with him-”

“I know, Dream,” Skeppy says patiently. “You can come with us to the waiting room, okay? And then you can wait up there, I’m not gonna make you go home, I know how much he means to you.”

And there’s something underlying that, but Dream pushes it aside and nods, following them to the elevator and clutching George’s hand the whole way. The doctors are already working quickly, getting him hooked up to an actual oxygen machine and sticking the IV in his arm, and Dream feels

like he's going to cry.

By the time they get to the hospital area, the doctors are trying to pull Dream away, but he's refusing to let go of George's hand. All he can think of is that he can't let George out of his sight, he can't, not again, he just *can't* -

And then the doors to the stairway pound open and Techno appears, looking more frantic than Dream has ever seen him. All movement stops, then starts again as Techno takes in the situation, then lunges forward and pulls Dream back.

"No!" Dream cries as his hand disconnects from George's. "No, I can't- I can't *leave* him, Techno, get off, get off-"

"We'll take good care of him, Dream," Skeppy promises. Dream feels his legs give out as Techno sinks down with him to the ground, holding onto him tightly, whether to keep him from running after George or to comfort him Dream doesn't know.

"Remember what I said, Dream," Techno murmurs into his ear. "Stay calm. He'll be alright."

"I can't lose him, Techno," Dream says, and Techno squeezes him a bit.

"I know, Dream," the Commander replies. "I know."

"I can't- I- Techno, I *love* him-"

"We all love him, Dream. We're not going to let anything happen to him. But you need to let the doctors do their work." Dream snuffles, then nods. Techno is looking at him with something close to pity, but still in pain. He's right, Dream knows it- they all love George, albeit in different ways. And the look in Techno's eyes clearly says he understands that when Dream says it, it has a bit deeper of a meaning. "Have you called anyone else?"

"No," Dream says, shaking his head. "No, um- I didn't want to bother Sapnap, and I think Niki and Puffy were still cleaning up-"

“Okay,” Techno says. “That’s what we’re going to do, then. We’re going to call everyone and let them know, so they don’t find out from the news tomorrow morning when this inevitably gets leaked out.”

“Okay,” Dream agrees, and he lets Techno help him up and get settled in one of the chairs in the waiting room. Techno pulls out his phone and waits until Dream is mostly calmed down. He knows he’ll have red eyes, but he can’t bring himself to care. Niki is the first one they call- she picks up almost immediately, her voice ringing out on speakerphone.

“Hey,” she says, much too chipper for nearly four in the morning. “We just got home, what’s going on? Is everything okay?”

“We’re at NASA right now,” Techno says. “George collapsed, couldn’t breathe for a bit.”

There’s a gasp from the other end of the phone. “Is he okay?” Niki demands. “He probably overexerted himself at the wedding, I knew I should’ve told him to take a break-”

“They just took him back, I’m here with Dream,” Techno explains. “As far as we know he’s fine-”

“We don’t,” Dream snaps. “We don’t know that, anything could be wrong with him, he-”

“Dream,” Niki says patiently. “Do you remember what you said to George, back on *Hermes*, that made him upset at you?”

Dream stops mid-rant, hands in the air, completely frozen.

“I told him he wasn’t any use to us if he kept getting hurt,” he says, and he can feel hot shame, because that was one of the worst things he’s ever said and he’s regretted it ever since, even if George forgives him-

“Right,” Niki says. “Well, right now, he’s hurt, and *you’re* no use to *him* if you can’t keep yourself calm. He needs you, Dream, and you need to be ready to be there for him.”

Dream ignores Techno’s pointed smirk of pride and takes a few deep breaths instead. Niki’s right,

she's always right, and he tells her as much.

"Of course I'm right," she says. "Puffy and I are going to change and then we'll be on our way, yeah? Say hi, Puffy."

"Hi," Puffy's voice says. She sounds distraught, almost, and Dream can relate. "We'll be there soon, duckling, okay? Thank you for being there, Commander." Dream flushes at the pet name, but it provokes him into taking a few more deep breaths, just so he's presentable when the rest of the crew arrives.

"Of course," Techno says. "We'll see you soon." He hangs up the phone and dials Phil's number next, Dream watching as Phil picks up on the second ring.

"Yeah?" he says, sounding completely asleep. "What's up, mate?"

"Dream and I are at the hospital," Techno says. "George."

"What happened?" Phil asks, immediately sounding completely awake, and Dream can imagine him shooting up out of bed.

"We don't know. Dream says he just collapsed and couldn't breathe, Niki thinks he probably overexerted himself at the wedding."

"Is Niki there?" Phil asks. "Or is it just you and Dream?"

"Just me and Dream. Skeppy's here, too, he's back with George. They just took him back, like, five minutes ago, it'll be awhile before we hear anything."

"Okay," Phil says. "I'll call Fundy, let him know he has to give a statement in the morning. Call Wilbur, yeah? If Skeppy's there then Bad will already know."

"Got it," Techno confirms, and Dream leans his head back and lets himself zone out as Techno calls Wilbur. He stares at the ceiling, counts the little dots, loses track and starts again. His fingernails are digging into his palms, and he knows they'll leave little crescent-marks, but he can't

bring himself to care. George could be dying, for all they know, and he's sitting out here doing nothing, completely useless-

"Do you want to call Sapnap, or should I?" Techno asks, snapping Dream out of whatever hellhole he was about to go down. He looks down at his hands- sure enough, there are a few small beads of red that he wipes away quickly.

"I don't want to bother him," Dream says.

"He'd want to know about this and you know it."

Dream swallows harshly and nods, gesturing for Techno to go ahead. Sapnap answers almost immediately.

"What's going on?" he asks. "I know you're not calling me on my wedding night for something unimportant, Commander-"

"George is in the hospital," Techno says. "Dream and I are here at NASA."

"He just- he just collapsed," Dream says, leaning in so the phone will pick his voice up, even though it isn't necessary. "And he couldn't breathe, and I-"

"We'll be there soon," Sapnap interrupts. "Don't worry, Dream, we're coming."

"Bring him a spare set of clothes," Techno advises, pulling the phone away from Dream. "He's still in his suit. Maybe grab a set for George, too."

"On it," Sapnap says, and Dream can imagine the salute if this were a normal situation, if they were on the *Hermes* and everything was okay, because right now nothing is okay and he doesn't know if it'll ever be okay and-

"Dream!" Techno practically yells, and Dream shakes his head. "Stop getting lost on me. Remember what Niki said. George is gonna need you."

“George has all of us,” Dream says, and he sounds choked, suddenly. He clears his throat, and it doesn’t feel better.

“I know George has all of us,” Techno says. “But he *needs* you.”

And that- that shatters Dream’s heart more than anything could. He nearly breaks down again, but Puffy and Niki choose that moment to come bursting through the door leading to the stairs. Puffy rushes for Dream immediately, holding out her arms, and he stands up and hugs her tightly.

“It’s gonna be okay,” she promises, and Dream just nods. He doesn’t think he can say anything else without bursting into tears.

As Puffy and Niki settle down across from them, Dream thinks. He thinks, and he prays to whatever gods may be listening that George will be alright. To Panacea, goddess of universal remedies, that he will be okay. He’s been through too much to not be okay.

Dream doesn’t consider himself a religious man, but he likes to think that the universe is kind. That the universe won’t see them end. That the universe is watching out for them, has been this whole time, knew while they were in space that they would be reunited. Dream doesn’t consider himself a religious man, but sitting in that waiting room, thinking of George, he prays to the universe that everything will be okay.

Sapnap and Karl join them shortly after, followed by Phil and the others. They keep up a tense vigil for the next four hours as they wait, and Dream’s certain they should have gotten some sort of news by now. At some point Phil and Fundy leave to talk to the news crews now gathered outside, and Dream watches as Fundy talks on the television in one corner of the waiting room.

“Early this morning, Doctor George Davidson was rushed to the hospital by his roommate. He is currently undergoing medical tests, but we’ve received word that he is still healthy and this is likely due to overexertion.”

Dream wonders if that’s speculation or if Fundy’s actually gotten word from the doctors. Maybe he has, Dream hasn’t really been paying attention. He can only hope that what Fundy’s saying is true.

“We assure the public that we will keep you entirely informed on Doctor Davidson’s status in the coming days, and inform that the whole Ares III crew is currently waiting for news as well. Please

do not spread misinformation- Doctor Davidson is doing alright. Thank you.”

He nods and ignores the sudden influx of questions from reporters, stepping back into the hospital, Phil closely on his heels. Dream’s foot is tapping rapidly as he watches them disappear from the television screen, and then Skeppy appears from around a corner.

Everyone perks up instantly. Skeppy looks exhausted, but he’s holding a file in one hand and is smiling. Dream is on his feet before he can even process what’s going on, and Sapnap grabs his hand to keep him from rushing forward.

“We just finished analyzing the test results,” Skeppy says. “His lungs haven’t gotten any worse since he first left the hospital, the tissue looks fine and there isn’t any additional scarring, which is a good sign. He was awake for a bit and we were able to talk to him- it sounds like it was definitely from overexertion, and fueled by a panic attack. But he’s completely fine. We’re gonna keep him for a couple of days for observation and extend the oxygen therapy by a month or two, but he should be good to go home soon.”

Dream falls back, a collective sigh of relief emanating throughout the room. There are hands on his back, keeping him steady, and he thinks that if they weren’t there grounding him he probably would have collapsed.

“Can we see him?” Sapnap asks, voice quiet.

“He’s out right now, but I can let one of you back, I guess.”

Sapnap and Techno both shove Dream forward, and he stumbles for a bit, then rights himself. Skeppy smiles at him and leads him back to the room George is in. Sure enough, he’s asleep, but there’s a nurse in one corner of the room. She leaves after Dream and Skeppy enter, and Dream watches her go.

“Just in case he woke up,” Skeppy explains. “So he wouldn’t be alone.”

And God, Dream never should’ve doubted any of the doctors at NASA, of course they know what they’re doing. Skeppy pulls up a chair and then leaves the room. Dream sits and clutches George’s hand tightly.

“I was so scared I lost you,” he murmurs, even though George can’t hear him. “God, George- I love you so much, you have no idea. Don’t ever do that to me again.”

He stays there for twenty minutes before George stirs, muttering something under his breath. Dream squeezes his hand tighter, and his eyes blink open.

“Hey,” he murmurs, and then he coughs. Dream reaches up with his other hand immediately, holding George’s face carefully, and George leans into the touch. He closes his eyes and rests his head back, and then he lifts his arms and makes grabby hands at Dream. “Come on. Cuddle.”

“What?” Dream whispers, half in shock. “Baby, you made me rush you to the hospital at three in the goddamn morning.”

“And now I want cuddles,” George pouts. “Skeppy told me I’m more or less cleared, come on-”

“Don’t ever fucking do that to me again,” Dream says, repeating his words from when George was asleep. George cracks a grin at him and continues making the same gesture with his hands. Dream acquiesces and climbs into bed next to George, and he immediately curls into his side. “That was terrifying, George.”

“I know,” George says. “But I’m okay now.”

“You wouldn’t wake up,” Dream says quietly, and he gives George a squeeze. George grips his hands and smiles up at him.

“But I did now,” George says. “Thank you. For saving me, again.”

“Anything for you, George,” Dream says with a smile, and he holds George a little bit tighter. “Anything for you.”

George leans his head back against Dream's shoulder and thinks. Because the first think he did when he woke up wasn't to stir- no, it was to take in everything around him, including the pressure on his hand clearly indicating that someone was holding it. And he heard Dream whisper, murmur to him.

"I was so scared I lost you. God, George- I love you so much, you have no idea. Don't ever do that to me again."

He'd fallen asleep again shortly after, however briefly, but he still heard it. Heard it, and processed it, and remembered it.

"I love you so much, you have no idea."

And he vows to himself, then and there, that he's going to tell Dream. He's *going* to. Once their future is certain and his health is stabilized and they know what NASA has planned next for them, once they know that everything is going to be okay, he'll tell Dream.

He'll tell Dream how much he means to him, how Dream has saved him time and time again, how at some points the thought of Dream was the only thing keeping him going on Mars. It's been more than a year- more than a *year* since George was on that little red planet, and he can still feel its grip on him, but when he looks at Dream, it's like all of that goes away.

So for now, he settles deeper into Dream's embrace, and he lets Dream hold him. And he thinks about how lucky he is, to have someone like Dream in his life, someone who will hold him when the times get tough and remind him to breathe, no matter what happens.

"Hey," Dream murmurs, rubbing slow circles into his arm. "What are you thinking about?"

"How amazing you are," George says honestly, and blush spread across Dream's cheeks. "How you saved me. Over and over again."

"It was nothing," Dream says, clearly embarrassed.

"It was everything," George replies, and Dream holds him impossibly tighter. Someday, he'll tell Dream. He'll tell Dream everything.

For now, he breathes.

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

[spotify playlist](#)

[quote bot](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always always always appreciated!!! :D

Astraeus

Chapter Notes

as you may have noticed, this is now part of a series!!! i was not ready to let this little world go just yet and the idea for a sequel went BAM and smacked me over the head. so a sequel it is!!! so subscribe to the series (or user sub to me ;)) if you want to see more!!!

please enjoy this chapter i've been waiting for this moment since like. chapter three
lmao you'll see what i mean by the end

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream refuses to leave George's bedside for the first full day he's in the hospital, and then Sapnap shows up and tells Dream he smells. Dream goes home to shower, and Sapnap sits cross-legged at the foot of George's bed and talks with him.

"You gave us a scare," is how he starts, and George instantly feels guilty. His lungs are still aching, though he's able to breathe okay, and he's been feeling bad about dragging everyone out of bed early in the morning after such a long day.

"Sorry for ruining your wedding night," he offers, and Sapnap waves him off.

"I was already married, remember? Besides, we had plenty of time to--"

"Stop talking," George mutters, and Sapnap laughs.

"Seriously, dude," he says. "Are you doing okay?"

"Just overexerted myself," George shrugs. "Isn't that what they said?"

"I guess," Sapnap replies. "Still." He's silent for a moment, and George can tell that there's something else he wants to say. He's biting his lip, shifting back and forth, but he doesn't want to spit it out, George can tell. George says it for him.

“Dream basically confessed to me last night.”

Sapnap laughs, like he was expecting it. “While you were awake?”

“No, he thought I was asleep,” George answers. “I wasn’t.”

“You were just letting him think you were? That’s mean, Georgie,” Sapnap teases. “Are you finally going to do something about it now?”

“I think so,” George says. “Because I love him too, you know.”

“Trust me, I know,” Sapnap snorts. “I’m the one that had to deal with his pining while you were on Mars.”

“What about me?” George huffs with a grin. “I had to deal with my *own* pining. I didn’t have anyone to listen to me except some potatoes and a camera.”

“Oh, how terrible,” Sapnap says, rolling his eyes. “When are you going to confess? The rest of us are sick of the mutual pining and no one doing anything about it, I had *Wilbur* text me the other day and ask if you’d finally gotten together or not.”

“When the time is right,” George says firmly. “I’ll do it when the time is right.” He doesn’t know when that’s going to be, but he swears to himself that it’ll be soon.

“Whatever you say, George,” Sapnap tells him, and they find other things to talk about while they wait for Dream to return.

It’s another day before George is cleared to go home. Skeppy asks how his lungs are feeling, and he tells the truth- they still feel like shit, but considerably better.

“Come in again if they start getting worse,” Skeppy advises. “Right away, George. I’m serious.”

George nods, knowing that if he even shows the slightest sign of discomfort, Dream will probably

drag him back to the hospital immediately. He glances at Dream out of the corner of his eye and sees Dream staring back at him.

“Okay,” George promises, grinning, still looking at Dream. “I will.” Skeppy just sighs and sends them on their way.

They still have a month left of their paid leave, and most of the crew has started getting bored. George finds Dream standing in their backyard and staring at the night sky on more than one occasion.

“Movie binge,” George suggests at dinner one night. The whole crew (plus Karl) has started gathering for dinner nearly every other evening, just spending time together before they watch a video log or two. “Just watch a whole ton of logs at once.”

“Bold of you to assume we want to look at you for that long,” Puffy says teasingly. “It’s not a bad idea, though. How long do we have until they’re released to the public?”

The table falls silent. George had completely forgotten about that- Wilbur mentioned that they’d managed to negotiate at least a year of privacy before the logs had to be released, considering their importance to NASA as a whole. And George-

George panics, for a brief moment, because he confesses to Dream in those logs, on the very last one he records, and he doesn’t need the public knowing about that before the crew does.

“Yeah,” he says, clearing his throat. It takes him a moment to realize that everyone is looking at him, that Dream has one hand on his knee under the table. “Yeah, I want you guys to see everything before the public does.”

“Then a movie binge it is,” Techno declares. “What sol are we on?”

“Four hundred forty-four,” Dream answers instantly. He stands up and starts clearing some of the plates from off the table, and the rest of the crew gets up to help him. Karl remains seated with George.

“Do you want to play some more Minecraft, then?” he asks, and George takes a deep breath. Everyone freezes.

“I’ve been talking with Alyssa,” he says. “And I think- I don’t want to watch the earlier logs. And there are a few I know that I shouldn’t watch. But I think if I’m with you guys, I can maybe try and watch some of them.”

“Only if you’re sure,” Dream says instantly, and George nods.

Which is how he finds himself wedged on the couch between Niki and Dream, Cat settled neatly in his lap, everyone else gathered around them as Puffy starts playing the sol’s log. George looks at himself, sitting in the Hab, spinning around in a chair and tossing a potato in the air.

“Sol 444,” his voice says from the speakers in their living room. “I just spent five sols driving in circles. I should be a product tester for Mars rovers when this whole thing is over.”

He snorts, and the rest of the crew laughs. He’d forgotten how long he spent coming up with jokes before he started filming logs, knowing it would make people laugh. The product tester joke took him ten minutes to come up with the previous day, while he was driving the damn rover in circles.

“Seriously, though. I wonder what I’ll do when this is over and done with. Who knows. Maybe I’ll just be a botanist for NASA. I could teach survival courses, or something, train new astronauts. I’m pretty famous, as of the last time I spoke to Wilbur, so I’m sure I could get some marketing deals and make a ton of money.”

“Sell-out,” Sapnap mutters, and George laughs. He still has no idea what he’s going to be doing- none of them do- and he hasn’t really thought about it that much.

“Or maybe I’ll bully the rest of the crew into settling down with me,” video-George says. “Buy a house next to Sapnap and Karl, convince Niki and Puffy to move in across the street. I could get Dream to be my roommate, he can’t say no to me. Techno would probably refuse to live anywhere near us, but then he’d get a house down the street anyways. That sounds nice.”

“Oh my God,” Puffy says. “George tells the future!”

“You’re right, I can’t say no to you,” Dream huffs.

“So now I guess I just have to hope everything’s going to be okay. And that maybe, one day, I’ll be able to see that. All of us living by each other. Being friends. Not worrying about the cold vacuum of space. It’d be nice.”

The log ends, and the crew looks to George.

“I’m okay,” he says. Watching himself on that screen, knowing how he was feeling... he’s been talking to Alyssa about it a lot. She told him only if he was ready, and he feels like he’s ready. Watching this log only confirms that. “I’m okay,” he repeats, and Puffy plays the next one.

“Sol 446,” video-George says. “I slept pretty much all day yesterday. Today’s the day that I start packing everything up. It’s gonna be like moving out, which is kind of sad.

“Psych! No it’s not. I’m so excited to get out of here, you wouldn’t believe it. Well, you probably would. It’s like moving out of your parents’ house all over again, except your parents are a very angry planet that wants to kill you.

“Anyways. Moving stuff around. Very exciting. I’m going to go do that now.”

George remembers the feeling of moving everything out of the Hab- it was incredible and terrifying all at once.

“Sol 449. Today’s the big day. I’m leaving for Schiaparelli.”

The crew cheers, and George grins.

“The rover and the trailer are all packed, the potatoes are cooked, and there’s even water aboard. I’ve spent the past few days running diagnostics on everything- it’s all good to go. No problems that I can see.”

“And did that hold true?” Puffy asks teasingly.

“It did!” George insists. “There weren’t any issues except for that damn dust storm!”

“I’m about to do the final shutdown on the Hab,” video-George continues. “It’s going to be rough, saying goodbye- four hundred and fifty sols in this cold metal walls.”

Techno snorts, like he knows what’s coming.

“Fuck yeah! I’m getting out of here! You know what- I don’t even care. I don’t care about the sentimentality, or whatever. That’s for losers who don’t have an entire planet trying to kill them. Schiaparelli or bust!”

The crew cheers again, and George can’t hold back the smile that spreads across his face. The rest of the logs are going to be recorded from the rover, probably, and maybe one or two on the MAV at the Ares IV site.

They keep watching logs- George winces occasionally, just at how unhappy he looks in the rover, even though he’s clearly putting on a brave face for the camera. He remembers recording these logs, then breaking down immediately after, just so completely done with everything about the little red planet and his stupid fucking time on it.

Dream reaches out and wraps an arm around him, and George leans into it. He glances at Niki next to him, and she smiles gently and takes his hand. The logs keep playing.

And then comes the day that begins with a cough and the camera shaking, video-George poking at it briefly before pulling back.

“Sol 498!” he declares. “Things didn’t go too well on my descent into the Schiaparelli Basin. To give you some indication of how unwell they went, I’m currently sitting cross-legged on the door of the rover. Because the door of the rover is on the ground. Because the rover is on its side.”

“I remember this day,” Sapnap mutters. “We were terrified, no one knew if you were alive or not.”

“I got bounced around a lot, a couple of cuts, but I’m a well-honed machine in times of crisis,” video-George says, like he’s responding to Sapnap. “As soon as the rover toppled, I curled into a little ball and let gravity throw me around. That’s how cool and action-hero-y I am. Dream would be proud, I think.”

“So proud,” Dream laughs, shaking his head, and George snickers. God, he talks about Dream a lot in these. He sees Sapnap and Karl both giving him a look that he chooses to ignore.

“Most of the interior is completely intact, which is great. My makeshift bedroom came unfolded a bit, but it’s just canvas, so that’s easy enough to throw into a little ball in the corner and make a problem for later. Plus, my navigation computer is okay. It’s telling me the rover is at an ‘unacceptably dangerous tilt.’ Yes, Nav. Thank you. Thank you *so* much.”

“How was that as a problem for later?” Puffy asks.

“Oh, I hated myself later for it,” George snorts, and the crew laughs.

“Most of my critical life support stuff is okay, too. The rover did its job. I’m going to have to suit up and go look for the trailer soon, because that’s kind of a big problem. I only have around twenty sols’ worth of oxygen left for EVAs, so I do have a bit of time to get things done. The only other thing I need is for the rover to work for another 220 kilometers and for the life support to work for fifty-one more sols. That’s it. That’s all I need.”

George waits for it.

“And, you know, I need the crew to pick me up successfully. Which I guess is like asking for a miracle, so. I need a miracle too.”

The log ends. The crew looks at him.

“We got a fucking miracle,” George lets out, grinning, and they cheer. It feels incredible, being surrounded by his best friends, reliving the worst days of his life and knowing that none of it matters now. None of it matters, because he’s here, and he’s alive. And that’s something spectacular.

“Sol 498, part two! Just got back from my EVA, and things aren’t too bad! Mind you, they’re not good, but they could be worse. I spelled out a little message for NASA, so they stop pissing themselves. I assume that’s what they’re doing. I assume that’s what they always do when I find myself in trouble. One of these days I’m going to get yelled at, and God, I can’t wait for that day to come.”

“I haven’t gotten yelled at yet,” George points out amidst the laughter from the crew, which only prolongs the chuckles.

“Anyways. I made myself a little to-do list and I’m going to get started on that tomorrow, when it’s a day that I didn’t spend getting tossed around like a piece of popcorn. Wish me luck.”

Puffy pauses and glances at the clock. George follows her gaze and realizes how late it’s gotten-nearly one in the morning.

“We can continue tomorrow,” Puffy says. “It’s not like any of us have anything else to be doing.”

“Just sleep over,” Dream offers. “We have plenty of room.”

Sapnap and Karl end up taking one guest bedroom, Puffy and Niki the other. Techno sleeps on the couch, and Dream and George pass out old clothes for people to sleep in. In the morning, George makes pancakes while Sapnap and Puffy throw flour at each other.

“This is gonna be hell to clean up,” Dream mutters to George as people start taking cups of coffee into the living room to continue watching the video logs.

“You’re telling me,” George replies. “Good thing I won’t be doing any of it. I can’t overexert myself, remember?” He finishes with a cheeky grin at Dream, who tries to scowl at him but ends up laughing instead.

George tries texting Skeppy to see if he can put off his oxygen therapy to make time for watching the logs, and Skeppy says ‘absolutely no way,’ which the crew agrees with.

“We’ll just come with you,” Karl offers, and everyone else seems to think that this is a good idea. They still have nearly an hour, meaning Puffy deems it enough time to get a few videos in.

“Sol 499. A very productive day,” video-George says. “I slept on the wall of the rover, which was fucking miserable, honestly, but I’ve done worse.”

“No kidding,” Techno says, to laughs from the crew.

“I was going to try and fix the trailer today, but that thing is completely upside down. I’m going to need the rover for it. So I spent the day getting the rover back right side up. And I did! I fucking did, and not a single damn thing was wrong with it. The people at the Jet Propulsion Lab really know what they’re doing when it comes to making rovers. If I get back to Earth, I’m buying Quackity a beer. Hell, I’m buying the entire JPL a beer. Beers for everyone if I get back to Earth!”

“So I’m waiting on that, actually,” Sapnap says with a grin, and George flips him off.

“Anyways. I’m out of daylight now, because I’m trapped in a fucking crater on Mars, so I’m going to have to deal with the trailer problem tomorrow. It’s probably stable enough for now, and that’s all that matters.”

“Sol 500.” Puffy pauses the video, and the entire crew cheers, George with them. Five hundred. Five. Hundred. That’s *huge*.

“First of all, holy fuck. 500 feels like a huge accomplishment. I’ve made it very, very far- several hundred kilometers, far, and also the hundred and seventy some million miles between Earth and Mars. Have I been in space the longest out of any person? Other than the crew, of course. I think we might have done it. If we haven’t yet, we certainly will by the time this is over.”

“You did,” Karl says. “You nearly doubled it, actually.”

“My plan for tipping the trailer over succeeded, but I ran out of sunlight again. Fucking crater. I’ll just spend the rest of the evening enjoying a potato. And by ‘enjoying’ I mean ‘hating so much I want to kill people.’ I am never going to eat another potato after this. Sorry, Techno.”

“I don’t blame you,” Techno says, though he looks a bit disgruntled. George grins at him. He’s eaten plenty of potatoes since then, and he hasn’t enjoyed a single one of them.

“Sol 501. I started the day with some nothin’ tea. I’m British, you know, so of course I drink tea. I came up with the idea for nothin’ tea a few weeks ago and forgot to mention it, but it’s very easy to make. First, get some hot water, then add nothin’. Perfection.”

The crew laughs raucously at this, and George himself laughs too. He’d forgotten about nothin’ tea. Maybe he should make some, just for old times’ sake.

They watch a few more logs- there are cheers again when George makes it to the MAV- and then all seven of them pile into one car for the drive to NASA. The nurses just sigh as they all troupe their way inside, where they spend the next three hours joking around while George has an oxygen mask over his face.

Then they go back to Dream and George's house and watch more video logs. George wonders if they're starting to get sick of his voice yet. He asks Dream while they're making their way into the house- Dream actually wheezes, then sobers up when he realizes George is being serious.

"After not hearing from you for a year and a half, I don't think any of us could ever get sick of your voice," Dream says honestly, which makes George feel considerably better.

They resume pretty much the same positions as that morning and the previous night, George sandwiched between Dream and Niki, the cats wandering around at their feet before settling down together near Sapnap. And the logs start again. With each one, they get closer to the end, closer to the moment George has been waiting for, and he doesn't know if he's going to be able to sit and watch the last one. He'll just have to see.

"Sol 526. There aren't many people who can say they've vandalized a three-billion-dollar spacecraft, but I'm one of them."

"Hell yeah you are!" Sapnap says.

"I'm not improvising anything, for once. I'm following NASA's script to the T. Sometimes I miss the days when I made all the decisions by myself, and then I remember I'm infinitely better off with a bunch of geniuses deciding what I do than I am making shit up as I go along. Unless it's the botanists. Fuck you, NASA's team of botanists. I'm still the best botanist on this fucking planet."

"You never gave up on that bit, did you?" Niki asks, and George shakes his head.

The crew cheers again on sol 543 when he says, "If everything goes right- I'm going home." They watch the few more days leading up to sol 549, and at that point, George excuses himself to the kitchen, saying he's going to get some water. He leans against the island counter and watches the television from over their heads as they all focus intently on the final log.

He listens to himself talk about all the ways he could die, and about how he's made his peace with

it, and then the log ends.

“Is that it?” Sappnap asks.

“There’s one more,” Puffy answers. She looks to George, who nods slowly. And she presses play.

“Sol 549. I realized I ended the video recording, but there was more I wanted to say. Since eventually these will be recovered, and the people I love will probably still be around by the time NASA releases them to the world, I wanted to leave a message. To the people I love.”

“Oh, God,” Puffy says. “We’re going to cry, aren’t we?”

“Hopefully not,” George says, and his heart is in his throat, pounding, beating, reminding him he’s still alive, he made it off Mars, he is so full of love, love, love-

“Just, a general message to the world: maybe I’m going to die. I don’t think I’m afraid of it. I’ve looked death in the eyes every day on this horrible, desolate, beautiful planet, and I’ve survived it all. If the stars have decided that now is my time to go, then fuck, I guess this is it. But I’m hopeful that there’s a brighter day ahead. Hemera, goddess of the day. Dream would be proud of my Greek mythology knowledge. I hope I get to tell him about all of this. I hope I get to tell the whole crew, hell, the whole *world*, about all of this.”

He can hear them starting to sniffle, and he doesn’t drag his eyes away from his own gaze on the television screen. It’s like he’s looking into his own soul, staring across planets, across galaxies, across universes to see himself.

“But if I don’t- well. Mom and Dad, I love you guys. Thank you for raising me. Wilbur, Bad, Quackity, Phil, Fundy, Tommy, Tubbo, and everyone else at NASA- thank you guys so much for working so hard to get me home. Whatever happens now isn’t your fault.”

He remembers this day. He remembers, a few hours before the launch, recording this log, about how he felt like he was going to be sick the entire time. He feels like he’s going to be sick now, but he pushes through it.

“Puffy- thank you for being the mother figure this whole crew needed. Thank you for being the tough but kind figure *I* needed. And Niki- thank you for being the completely kind figure, and for

not beating around the bush with me. You two are two of the most incredible women I've ever met."

"Oh, *George*," Niki gasps, and Puffy doesn't look like she's doing much better.

"Commander- Techno. Techno. Don't blame yourself, if something goes wrong. We all did the best we could. I'm proud of you for making the tough decisions that the rest of us couldn't."

"George," Techno mutters, and George barely holds back a watery laugh. There are tears in his own eyes, now, because *look how far he's come*.

"Sapnap- thank you for being my best friend all this time. You and Karl are going to live long, happy lives, and if something goes wrong, I'll be watching you from the stars."

"George-" Sapnap says, but he cuts himself off when video-George continues talking.

"And Dream- God. Dream."

There's a long pause on the screen. Video-George looks away, then back into the camera.

"Dream, I think you're probably the love of my life, and I know you're doing everything you can to get me home. So, I know we sort of let this unspoken thing be unspoken, but if I'm going to die, I might as well say it now. I love you. I love you more than all the stars in the sky."

There's silence. Complete and utter silence. Video-George breaks it.

"I think that's it. I think that's all I have to say. I'm going to be launched into space. I may not survive. But if I do survive, well- what a story that'll be."

Video-George reaches out, and the camera goes black. There's complete silence in the house, George standing in the kitchen, the crew and Karl sitting in the living room, something so thick in the air that he could cut it with a knife.

Techno is the first to stand up, completely shocking George by striding across the distance between them and pulling George into a tight hug. George hugs the Commander back, and he holds back his tears because Techno won't cry, so neither will he. When he pulls back, he sees that Techno's eyes are red.

"You survived," Techno says, voice gravelly. "And I couldn't be more proud of you, Davidson."

George nods and salutes, and there's a moment before Niki slams into him from the side. She wraps her arms around him tightly, and he hugs her back.

"You are *spectacular*," she tells him earnestly, tears streaming down her face, and she steps away so Puffy can hug him.

"You did that," Puffy says with a watery grin. Karl and Sapnap jump on him moments later, both of them crying, neither of them saying a word. George just hugs each of them, and then he looks at Dream.

Dream, who is still sitting on the couch, staring at the blank television screen. The others make their excuses, say they'll see each other tomorrow for dinner, slowly make their way out of the house. George creeps toward the living room once they've gone, waiting for Dream to acknowledge him.

He comes around the corner of the couch and sees Dream, tears fresh on his face, hardly moving, hardly breathing. Dream shifts to look at him, barely, and snuffles.

"Hi," George says, and he can feel a tear of his own rolling down his cheek. Dream stands up swiftly, then slows, like he's unsure of himself.

"Hey," Dream replies, stopping a good foot away. George takes a step forward to close the distance between them, and Dream reaches one hand up to cup the side of George's face. He brushes away the tear with his thumb, and George leans into his hand. "Did you mean it?"

"I love you so much, you have no idea," George says, the words Dream said to him what feels like yesterday. "More than all the stars in the sky, more than all the planets in the solar system, more than Astraeus loves his creations."

“Astraeus,” Dream echoes. “Titan god of stars and planets.”

“Father of the stars themselves,” George finishes. “I love you more than he loves this universe. I love you more than anything in the world, Dream, anything in the universe.”

Dream laughs and wipes at his eyes a bit, one hand still holding George’s face. His other hand eventually settles on George’s waist, and George lets his hands drift up to either side of Dream’s neck.

“I love you, too,” Dream murmurs. “More than the sun and the moon and every Greek god. More than space and Earth and everything in between. You’re spectacular, George. You’re a miracle. You’re my stardust.”

And he leans down and presses their lips together, and it feels like a supernova, like an explosion of all the brightest matter in the universe, like worlds starting and ending and stars bursting in on themselves. George presses them tighter together, fitting like puzzle pieces designed to be with each other, and when he finally pulls back, there are tears in both their eyes.

He’s never felt more alive.

Chapter End Notes

[twitter](#)

[spotify playlist](#)

[quote bot](#)

[andthentheybot](#)

comments/kudos/etc are always appreciated <333

Pyroeis

Chapter Summary

please read chapter notes!! <3

Chapter Notes

holy wowza. holy freakin wowza. i cannot believe this is the end (even though it's not really the end). this has been one of the biggest projects i've ever embarked on, and i am so thankful for all the support this has received. you lot are fucking incredible. i read and appreciate every single comment, every single bookmark- all you guys do makes me so, so happy to be writing for this fandom.

that being said, it's not done yet!! make sure to subscribe to the series or user-sub to me so you don't miss more! there's going to be at least one more major work in this series, and i also have a TON of one-shots planned both before, during, and after this fic. so hit before you read this chapter, hit that user sub or series sub button to make sure you don't miss any of it!

also, a small note: i am aware that niki's boundaries on shipping have changed, so i've already gone back and completely edited this fic to remove romantic puffychu. not much has changed, niki and puffy are just no longer a romantic couple to respect niki's stance on shipping :)

with that said, on to the epilogue! i can't say when the next work will be out, but i can say it'll be titled 'gods of the sky' and it should hopefully be ready by the end of the month! love you guys, enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George wakes up the next morning wrapped in Dream's arms, and he knows that something is different. They're curled together and Dream's lips are in his hair, pressing kisses along the top of his head, and he giggles as the previous day comes rushing back to him. He tilts his head upward and Dream's lips catch his own.

"Hey, baby," Dream says, and there's a whole new meaning behind the word. George twists in Dream's grip so they're facing each other, then reaches one hand up to run it through Dream's hair. "How'd you sleep?"

"You simp," George says. "I love you."

Dream wheezes. “I love you too, idiot. Is that gonna be the first thing you say to me every day?”

“Maybe,” George says. He punctuates it with a yawn and stretches, and Dream catches one hand and laces their fingers together. “Oh, we’re going to be that horrible PDA couple, aren’t we?”

Dream laughs again and buries his head in George’s chest. George wraps both arms around him tightly and thinks that he doesn’t ever want to let go.

“Yeah,” Dream answers. “We’re going to be terrible.”

“Our friends are going to hate us,” George snorts. “Oh my God, our friends.”

“They’re gonna have a field day,” Dream says warningly. “Oh, they’re gonna be all over us.”

“Well, we don’t need to deal with that yet,” George hums, pulling Dream tighter against his chest. “We can just lay here all day.”

“You have therapy,” Dream reminds him. “And I want to go to the gas station and get those shitty cheeseburgers, because this is cause for celebration.”

“What, us confessing our undying love for each other?” George remarks. “We didn’t even get together.”

“Oh, did I not do that?” Dream asks. He curves his neck back so he can look George in the eyes. “Doctor George Davidson, will you be my boyfriend?”

“Of course I will,” George says. He leans down to kiss Dream again, and this is what life is supposed to be, he thinks. Laying in bed with the love of his life on *Earth*, and God, he never wants to get up.

Unfortunately, Dream is right, he does have his oxygen therapy (and his regular therapy) to get to. George clutches Dream’s hand while he drives, and if Skeppy notices anything different between the two of him, he doesn’t say anything.

Sapnap texts George later in the afternoon, asking how things went with Dream. George just sends back a winky face, and the crew's group chat immediately explodes with screenshots from Sapnap and the demands for an explanation.

"Do we tell them?" George asks Dream, who laughs and holds out his camera. "What are you—"

Dream presses the button right as he presses his lips to George's, then sends the photo to the group chat, which promptly explodes again.

They have a big family dinner that weekend, where Sapnap loudly announces to the entire table the developments in George and Dream's relationship. George blushes under all the attention- he swears it's worse than when they go back from Mars- and just waves them off as he holds Dream's hand.

Another few weeks pass. George finds that the domesticity of everyday life really does suit him, after all. Things are good. They're so good, in fact, that he starts worrying about all the things that could go wrong.

"George," Alyssa tells him as he sits across from her in her office. "It's not healthy to think about things like that. They're good now. Appreciate them. Don't be thinking about the future."

It's hard not to think about the future when Phil calls the crew and tells them there's going to be a major meeting with the entire NASA board of directors. The end of their six months of paid leave is coming up, and it's time for them to discuss future job options. They schedule the meeting for the day the paid leave is up, with the promise that they'll continue to be paid until they actually start working again.

Nearing the six month mark, George is also scheduled for an entire day full of tests. He goes to the meeting with high hopes- the last time he was in the hospital they told him there wasn't any new scarring on his lungs, after all. He can push aside the fact that his lungs have felt like shit ever since the whole Incident with him collapsing. The day before the meeting with the board, he goes in for the tests; Dream agrees to wait in the cafeteria the entire time he's there.

It's incredibly boring, in all honesty. It takes nearly eight hours, and when it's done, Skeppy promises to call with the results within the next couple of days. George just nods and lets Dream drive him home, and then they cuddle on the couch for another two hours before Dream makes him go to bed.

They dress up nice for the meeting, joining Niki and Puffy on the elevator when they get to the building. They chat for a bit and find Technoblade and Sapnap already waiting in the conference room, along with a whole slew of other people. George recognizes Phil, Bad, Wilbur, Quackity, and Fundy, and pretty much no one else. He tries not to let it bother him as he takes a seat between Dream and Techno.

“So,” Phil starts. “We’re assembled here today, completely on the record, to discuss future options for the six crew of the Ares III mission. All of you are incredibly valuable NASA employees, and it would be our honor to strive to find positions for you that fit. This is just a meeting to discuss possibilities- we’ll have another meeting to draw up contracts, et cetera, at a different time. You’ll continue to be put on paid leave until you start your new positions. Sound good to everyone?”

The crew all nods in agreement, and the directors look pleased with Phil’s wording. Fundy is nodding at the other end of the table.

“Now, then,” Phil says. “I’m going to give you some offers. Any of you are welcome to accept or deny, or think about it. Again, this meeting is just coming up with possibilities.” He stands up and clears his throat, nodding to Wilbur.

“First and foremost, there’s the matter of Ares 5,” Wilbur says. “As Director of Mars Missions, I have final say in who is and isn’t on the crew. Similar to Ares III, Ares 5 will be a crew of six. Two spots are already filled by the Chinese, as part of the *Taiyang Shen* deal. The other four spots, including the space for a Commander, are left up to us.” He pauses and glances around the table. “Meaning if any four of you would like to take part in Ares 5, we would be open to discussions about that.” He lets that sink in for a moment, then nods to Quackity.

“There’s also the matter of *Hermes*, ” Quackity continues. “We’ve spent the past six months doing remote evaluations while she orbits Earth, and our final assessment says that with some minor and major repairs, she’s good to fly another two Ares missions, at least. Major repairs include the replacement of the doors on Airlock 1, as well as a few regular maintenance things, along with a slew of minor checks and such. Being that you all know your way around the *Hermes* better than any other, we’re opening that team up to you as well. If you’d like to return to *Hermes* for a few months and assist with or lead repairs, that’s another option.”

“We’ve also got the positions you held before the Ares III mission,” Bad adds. “Mission Control could use excellent workers like yourselves. Your departments miss you greatly, I’m sure. There’s also a number of colleges and universities that would love to have you in their programs if you’d prefer that, or you could teach different training programs here.”

There’s silence as they stare the group down. George remembers what Skeppy told him the

previous day, while they were taking a break from tests- he is *not* allowed to go back to space.

“So, just making a mental list,” Puffy says. “We’ve got Ares 5, which isn’t for a couple of years so we’ve got other things in the meantime. Other things being the *Hermes* maintenance run, our previous departments, teaching, and... that’s it?”

“That’s what we’ve come up with, yes,” Phil confirms. “You don’t have to let us know now. It’s just something to think about.”

“We have pushed up the Ares 5 date,” Wilbur adds quickly. “With Ares IV being called off, and everything.”

“Sorry about that,” George mutters, and the board of directors laughs.

“Originally it was supposed to leave seven years from now. It’s now leaving two and a half, if everything goes as planned,” Wilbur finishes with a half-smile at George. Sapnap whistles.

“So how long do we have to get back to you on that one?” Niki asks curiously.

“Six months it when we want the crew finalized by,” Wilbur says. “So you have a while. But it would be better to know sooner so we can start looking for other candidates.”

“I want to help with the *Hermes*,” Puffy declares suddenly. “I’m the systems operator, I know her better than anyone else.”

“Then we’ll put you on the lead,” Phil nods, looking back at the other directors. None of them seem to have any problem with this. “Anyone else for *Hermes*?”

“I’d like to think about it,” Sapnap says. “Discuss with my husband. But I think I would be interested.”

“I would, too,” Techno says with a nod.

“I’m out in terms of space,” George says quietly. “Doctor’s orders. But I’d- I mean, I’d be interested in a teaching position. I joked about it. Teaching survival courses. Or testing JPL’s rovers, I got really good at that.”

The board laughs again, and George grins.

“I go where George goes,” Dream says. George glances at him, and he’s grinning easily. “Psychologist’s orders. I’d have to think over the different possibilities, I think.”

“I would as well,” Niki says with a nod.

“Great, then,” Phil says. “We’ll schedule another meeting for a few days from now, give you plenty of time to mull over the options. Meeting adjourned.”

The directors begin to file out, and the crew remains in their positions. Once they’re gone, all six of them whirl on Phil.

“You’re kidding,” Puffy says instantly. “You’d let us go back to space? After the whole-” she cuts herself off and glances around the room.

“We’re off the record now,” Fundy says.

“After the whole mutiny thing?” she finishes, hands splayed on the table. “You’re letting us go back to space?”

“The mutiny thing isn’t exactly public knowledge,” Phil says slowly. “And it’s going to stay that way. So, yes, we’re going to let you go back to space.”

“Fucking sick,” Puffy says, sitting back in her chair. “How long is the Ares 5 mission gonna be?”

“A little less than a year and a half, give or take,” Wilbur says. “Travel time, forty sols on Mars, travel time back. The primary objective is basically what Ares III’s was, since you didn’t get to finish it out, combined with most of Ares IV’s, since we had to scrap that one.”

“Sorry again about that,” George cringes.

“Not your fault, mate,” Phil says, shaking his head.

“Were you serious about testing rovers, though?” Quackity asks. “Because I’d totally let you do it.” George perks up and nods, and Quackity fist-pumps.

“Anyways,” Bad says, clearing his throat. “We do need a commander for Ares 5, and any one of you would be fit for the job. In addition to that, we’ve got a couple other moon projects that have been kept largely under wraps that I don’t think you’re technically supposed to know about, as well as the usual ISS missions that you’d all be welcome on.”

“We’ll have to think about it,” Techno says. “Thank you, though. For giving us the opportunity to go back.”

“Of course,” Phil says. “You lot are some of the best astronauts we’ve ever had. It’d be a right shame to take what you love away from you.”

George frowns slightly, then immediately tries not to show it. Because yeah, he wants to go back to space a little bit, as long as he’s far away from Mars. As if the universe is telling him not to, his phone starts to ring. He pulls it out and sees it’s from Skeppy.

“One second,” he says. “I’ll be right back.”

The others nod, and George slips out of the room. He answers the phone and brings it up to his ear.

“Hey, Doc,” he says. “What’s the verdict? Am I going to live?”

He’s mostly joking. Skeppy’s tone is completely serious.

“George,” he says. “We need to run more tests. Like, a lot more tests. We missed something last time. Something big.”

George's heart falls. Jesus Christ, of course he can't just have this, of course Mars is going to keep fucking him over. He takes a few deep breaths, trying to keep himself calm, and he tries to ignore the way they hurt. Tries to ignore the way they've *been* hurting for the past month. He thought he was just recovering from the whole Incident with him collapsing and everything, but by Skeppy's tone, it could be worse.

"George?" Skeppy asks when he doesn't respond for a while.

"Yeah," George says suddenly. "Yeah, I'm here. What did we miss?"

"George, there's been a lot more scarring," Skeppy says. "We didn't notice it last time because it's kept hidden until now. We're going to keep monitoring you, run those tests once a week, but if it keeps getting worse, we're going to have to consider other options."

"But we don't need to consider those other options now," George says slowly.

"No," Skeppy agrees. "But we may need to soon."

"Alright," George says, swallowing harshly. He'll tell Dream tonight. He'll tell the rest of the crew later. It'll be fine. "Thank you, Skeppy."

"Stay safe, George," Skeppy says, and he hangs up the phone.

George sighs and slips his cell phone back into his pocket, then tries to brighten his face as he goes back into the conference room. He knows it doesn't work- Dream is looking at him with concern, and once the rest of the crew notice him, they all give him the same looks. He just shakes his head minutely, and they seem to get it.

"Well, this has been eventful," Sapnap declares, the first to act. "I say we go out to dinner." He turns to the other five non-crew members still in the room. "You want to join us?"

"Work to do," Fundy says quickly. "Thanks for the offer."

“I remember the last time I went out with you,” Bad snorts. “I’m in.”

“Kristin’s making dinner, sorry, mate,” Phil shrugs.

“Yeah, I’ll come,” Quackity grins. “Wilbur?”

“Sure, alright,” Wilbur sighs.

“Three out of five, not bad,” Puffy says, and the group laughs.

They decide on a restaurant and make their way out of the building. The car ride there is nearly silent, until they’re about to pull into the parking lot.

“What’s wrong, George?” Dream asks, reaching over to grip his hand.

“There’s been more scarring,” George says quietly. “They’re going to keep monitoring. But apparently it isn’t looking good, and it isn’t feeling good, either.”

He puts a hand to his chest, trying to get his point across, and Dream grimaces.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” he asks, and George shrugs.

“Figured it would go away,” he answers. “It’ll be alright, Dream.”

“Okay,” Dream says. “I believe you.”

They step out of the car- it’s already getting dark outside. George picks out one of the brightest lights in the sky, just over the treeline. He tugs on Dream’s hand, and Dream pauses. George points it out.

“Pyroeis,” Dream says with a grin. “God of the Wandering Star.”

“Mars,” George breathes out, and he tears his gaze away as Sapnap calls out for them, the rest of the crew behind him. He knows that no matter what tomorrow brings, he’ll have his family there to support him on the ground, and he’ll have the stars up above.

Chapter End Notes

come hang out with me on [twitter](#) for updates on this series and other writing!

this fic has a [spotify playlist](#) if you'd like to listen!!

we've also got some bots for my work!

[quote bot](#)

[andthentheybot](#)

and of course, don't forget to subscribe to the series! (or user sub to me, that works too)

per usual: comments, kudos, etc are always appreciated! thank you all for joining me on this magnificent journey, and make sure to stick around for more!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!